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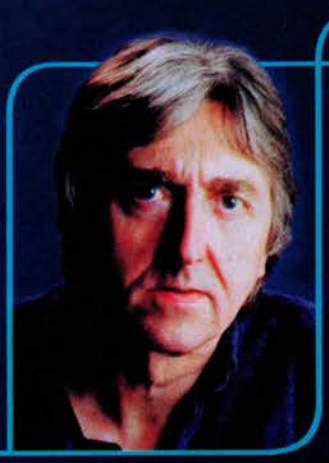

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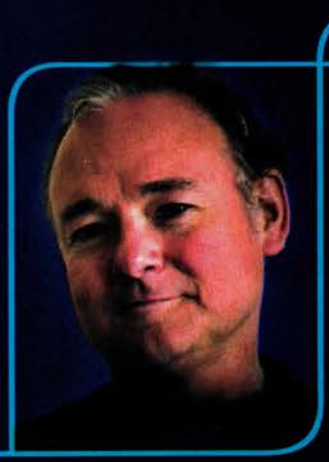

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Cover Photo by **Dennis Kleiman**.

Soundhole The Myth of Rebellion

It's difficult for anyone baptised in the messy and turbulent majesty of rock's infancy to admit that the game was rigged from the beginning. Sure, it took a while for businessmen to see the tornado of cash whipping around that crazy beat, but once they got hip, they got *paid*. And, back then, there was still a chance some certifiably crazy mother could hot-wire his psychoses into a two-minute opera of rage and lust that drove kids just batty enough to make the guy a star. Of course he got screwed, too—Cadillac-ed and coddled into dreamland while some crafty bastard in a suit built palaces with the "real" money. Yeah, it's a boring old story. But even today, if you're brave and foolish enough to follow the money, you'll never again be able to watch a pop star rap about "art" and "keeping it real" without laughing your ass off.

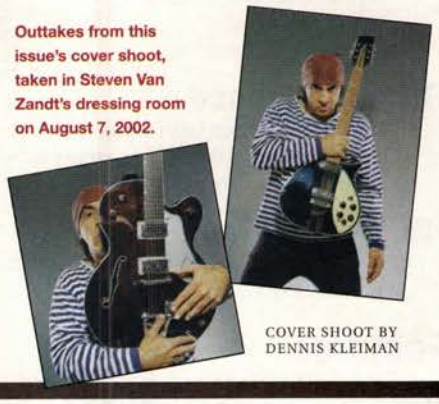
Take the rapper who celebrates his gangster mystique, yet gleefully partners with a cable network to promote his CD. Underneath the pose is just another smart artist/businessman who knows where the bread is buttered. And how about the once-credible poet of the working man who, desperate to sell uber-star levels of albums, embraces the dorky and calculated media stunts of a national morning show?

The kicker is that you can grab just about any current consumer-music mag and read why such-and-such artist's latest release is so masterful, so deeply emotional, and so evocative of our times. Well, that record was likely produced after a number of demographic surveys and focus groups generated credible data about the types of artists and musical styles the public is buying. And whatever individuality said artist *might* have had was filtered through A&R executives, business managers, and career-savvy producers. Then the music was layered and fixed up and auto-tuned and cut-and-pasted to ensure a pleasant listening experience. Hey kids, answer the clue phone—this ain't rock and roll!

I mourn the demise of authenticity in much of today's music, and I deplore the homogenization of talent. (Can you imagine the crippled and sinister Gene Vincent yakking it up with Carson Daly on *TRL*?) Happily, I can find solace in a Web community where any wacko or genius can upload mp3s. It is only in this environment of digital anarchy—where *sound* is the great equalizer—that rebels can truly flourish. I'm hoping *GP* readers are up there igniting the next revolution of credibility, passion, and guts in music. It has been a long time since the glory days, baby, and I'm waiting to be astounded again. —MICHAEL MOLENDA

Editor boy and new *GP* Associate Editor Barry Cleveland (right) in the mag's sound lab, August 2002. Barry is a fine guitarist and a brilliant editor who previously worked with *Onstage*, *Mix*, and *Electronic Musician*.

Outtakes from this issue's cover shoot, taken in Steven Van Zandt's dressing room on August 7, 2002.



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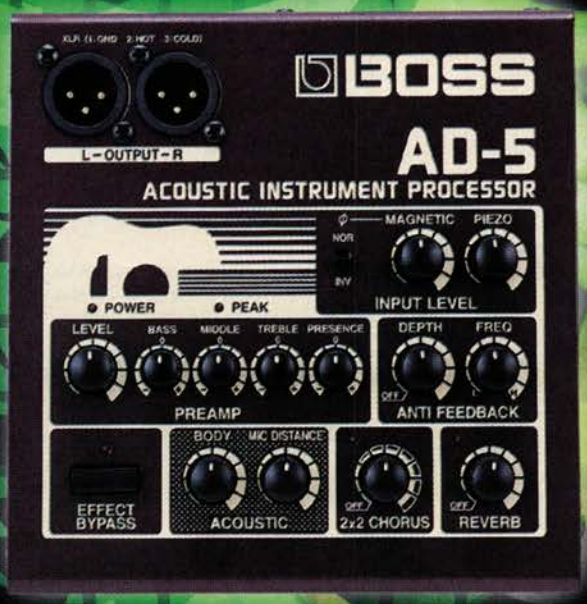

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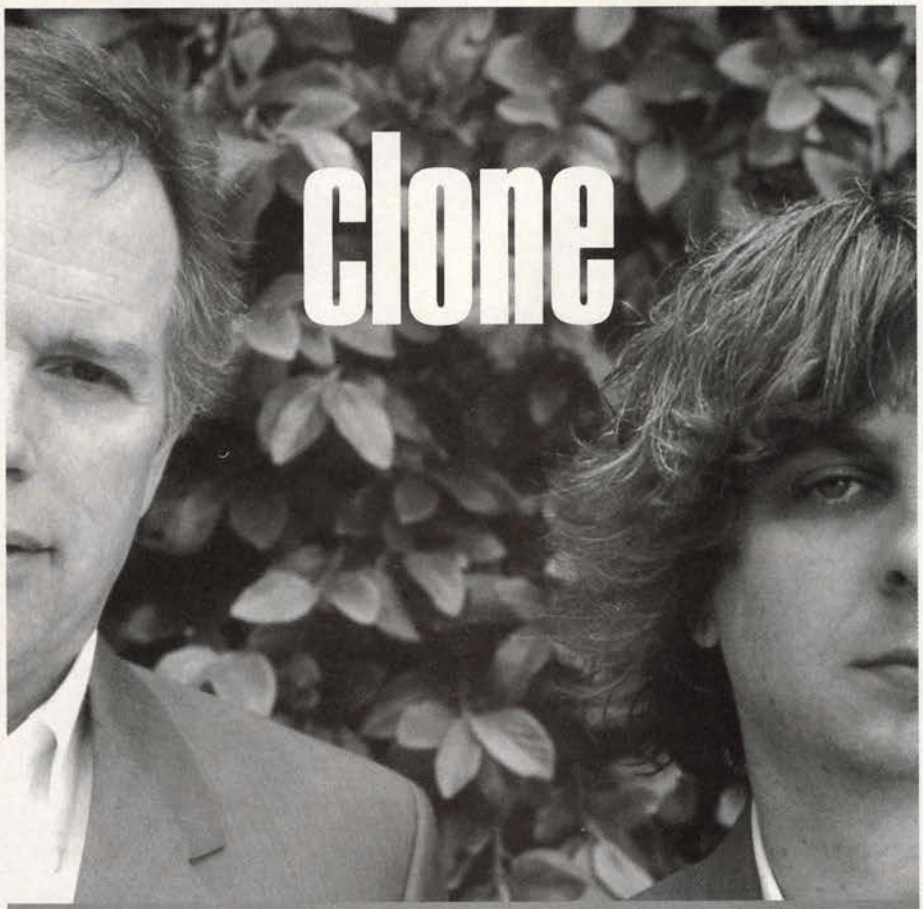

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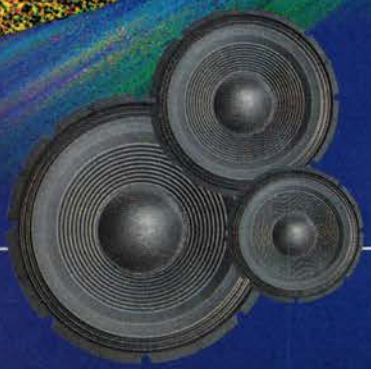

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Feedback

Stompboxes!

I just received my September '02 issue, and you guys deserve some real applause. First, the cover is some of your best design work *ever*. That cover needs to be placed in your top ten of all time without the benefit of a player's mug dead center. If I wasn't a subscriber, it's the kind of cover that would have begged me to buy that issue.

Secondly, the Jorgenson/Django "Hot Clubbing" article moved me to finally take action and listen to the celebrated Mr. Reinhardt. I've played for 37 years, and now I finally know why so many of my heroes place him on their honor roll. Thanks for continuing to admonish us all to listen to diverse styles. No matter what niche we place ourselves in, we can all grow from listening to classical, rock, punk, and country. Keep publishing the best!

Jon Stout
El Paso, TX

I really enjoyed your cover story "Hallowed Ground." I own—or have owned—11 out of those 50 pedals. One bizarre effect I remember was the Jordan Bosstone fuzz. Technically it wasn't a stompbox—it plugged into your guitar's output jack—but it was a very square wave-sounding fuzz, and from 1967 to '68, almost every guitarist in a Minnesota bar band had one.

Phil Brigham
Brockton, MA

In what was otherwise a fine, fun feature on vintage pedals you spotlighted the Vox Tonebender and cited Jeff Beck's use of same. I believe Beck used a ColorSound Tonebender Mk II in the Yardbirds, and Jimmy Page used the same pedal on early Zeppelin tracks. For fans of those great tones, please give credit where credit is due.

Jon Stickley
Columbus, OH

Let me get this straight. You feature an article with a guitarist of Dave Davies' caliber, and yet you put a stompbox on the cover of your magazine? Come on gang, you owe Dave—and *me*— one.

Bob Chaisson
Fredericksburg, VA

Rush

Thanks for the article on Alex Lifeson ["The Lifeson Chronicles," Aug. '02]. It's great to have him back in the studio and on the road. Rush has proven that longevity has its rewards. In an age of reunion tours, it's refreshing to know a band of their caliber doesn't have to break up and reunite in order to draw attention. Rush has always managed to maintain the delicate balance of taking their music seriously without taking themselves too seriously. The band members have never rested on their laurels, and they continue to progress musically.

After playing guitar for 25 years, I can say without a doubt that Alex is my biggest influence. From the intense solo in "La Villa Strangiato" to the fat rhythm on "Secret Touch" to the melodic tone on "Resist," Alex covers it all.

Joe Osborne
Charlottesville, VA

Larry Carlton

Thanks for the information on Larry Carlton's recently made-over Gibson ES-335

["Setups of the Stars," Aug. '02]. Although I was particularly glad to learn the details of Mr. 335's set up, I was more pleased with how great this prized ax looks after a (well deserved) day at the spa. I found myself staring at the photo with the realization that this is, more than likely, the guitar that soared on hundreds of incredible recordings including Steely Dan, Joni Mitchell, Michael Franks, and the Crusaders. It's evident that Larry Carlton does indeed, walk tall and carry a big stick. Keep up the great work Guitar Player!

Jeff Weir
Simi Valley, CA

The Solo Debate Continues...

In the Sept. '02 Feedback, a young reader expressed his dislike about the amount of material devoted to guitar soloing. He questioned the usefulness of soloing in modern music, and posed the following question: "Why should the younger generation respect the past if you don't respect the present?" This question was aimed at the so-called "old school" guitar players. Apparently, some of the younger generation perceives guitar soloing as being clichéd or invalid for use in modern music. While it's true that it's not musically valid to throw a guitar solo in a song because you've completed the second chorus (or an outro is needed), the real aim of soloing is to enhance the message the song is conveying. In its most exciting form, a guitar solo tells a story all its own. This is why so many guitar players—myself included— pay so much attention to the articles on soloing. We're looking to expand our knowledge of the fretboard and learn from others.

When I read articles on soloing from masters such as Stevie Ray Vaughan and Brian Setzer it gives me the opportunity to absorb the creativity of some of music's greatest artists. Great soloists use guitar licks to convey their message and their emotion—*that's* the creative potential in guitar soloing. (Not to mention the knowledge that scales and soloing bring to chord building.)

I understand that discussions about soloing can be a bit tiring. And, sometimes, guitarists can come across as having a mechanical approach to scales and modality. However, there are dangers in avoiding soloing because it doesn't seem to "belong" in your generation's music: You could be limiting your compositions *and* the way you express yourself as a musician. You ask, "Why should the younger generation respect the past if you don't respect the present?" I ask, "Why shouldn't the present seek to gain insight from the past?" Perhaps then the past *will* respect the present.

Doug Sparks
Springfield, MO

Address correspondence to Feedback, c/o Guitar Player, *2800 Campus Dr., San Mateo, CA 94403, or e-mail us at guitplyr@musicplayer.com.* GP *regrets that until the advent of the 40-hour workday we will not be able to answer every letter.*

Celebrating 20 years of Seagull

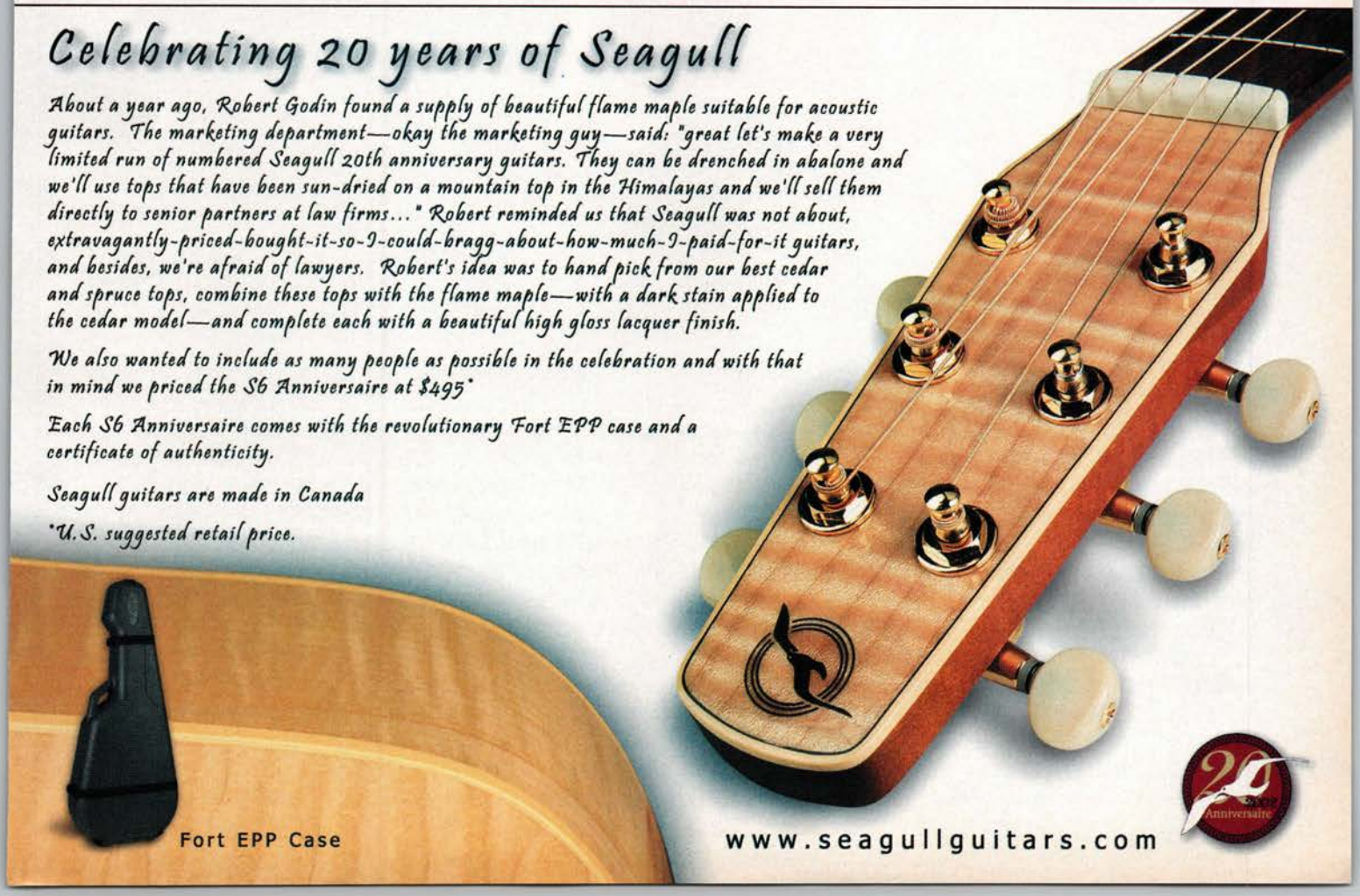
About a year ago, Robert Godin found a supply of beautiful flame maple suitable for acoustic guitars. The marketing department—okay the marketing guy—said: "great let's make a very limited run of numbered Seagull 20th anniversary guitars. They can be drenched in abalone and we'll use tops that have been sun-dried on a mountain top in the Himalayas and we'll sell them directly to senior partners at law firms..." Robert reminded us that Seagull was not about, extravagantly-priced-bought-it-so-I-could-bragg-about-how-much-I-paid-for-it guitars, and besides, we're afraid of lawyers. Robert's idea was to hand pick from our best cedar and spruce tops, combine these tops with the flame maple—with a dark stain applied to the cedar model—and complete each with a beautiful high gloss lacquer finish.

We also wanted to include as many people as possible in the celebration and with that in mind we priced the S6 Anniversaire at $495*

Each S6 Anniversaire comes with the revolutionary Fort EPP case and a certificate of authenticity.

Seagull guitars are made in Canada

*U.S. suggested retail price.



Fifty years ago, a small group of veteran guitar makers came together to form a new company. Its founder, Alfred Dronge, had been born in Poland, and several of his key workers were immigrants from Italy, with its rich heritage of musical instrument craftsmanship. Among them, these men had decades of experience, and they had already built some of the most elegant guitars the world had ever seen.

For their new company, they picked the name Guild, which evoked the spirit of European artisan guilds of centuries past, and also suggested their shared commitment to excellence. In their original factory, on Pearl Street in New York City, and then in later factories in Hoboken, New Jersey and Westerly, Rhode Island, attention to detail was the order of the day. Some guitars were built almost entirely by a single person.

What was remarkable about Guild was that it went on to build fine guitars in so many different styles—archtops favored by giants of the jazz community, and flattop and electric guitars that became classics during the folk boom of the '50s and '60s, as well as the rock era of the British Invasion, folk-rock, the blues revival, and psychedelia.

Perhaps even more remarkable is that while these guitars were famous for their rich sound, beauty, and craftsmanship, they were equally famous for their durability and value.

Many of the world's best players chose Guild guitars for their uncompromised tone and elegance.

The New Guild Guitars...
Made to be Played

And many beginners chose Guild guitars because of their affordability.

A half-century after the founding of this historic company, there's great news for players of all styles: Guild is back—the same elegance, the same affordability, the same classic models, plus some innovative new models—and this time, Guild is backed by Fender.

Fender has committed its full support and all its resources: environmentally controlled factories, a large and highly skilled work force, financial stability, its innovative R&D department, its famous custom shop, and its worldwide network of dealers and warranty repair outlets.

If you've been around awhile, you'll remember the Guild Starfires, the Bluesbirds, the 12-strings, the beautiful dreadnoughts, the fabulous archtops. If you're a younger player, the Guild name may be something of a legend. But whatever your age, whatever your playing style, and whatever your budget, I think it's great news, for all of us, that Fender has brought back the quality, the original designs, and the value that made Guild one of the most distinguished names in guitars.

—Tom Wheeler
Author, Historian
and Consulting Editor,
Guitar Player Magazine

GUILD ®

www.fender.com

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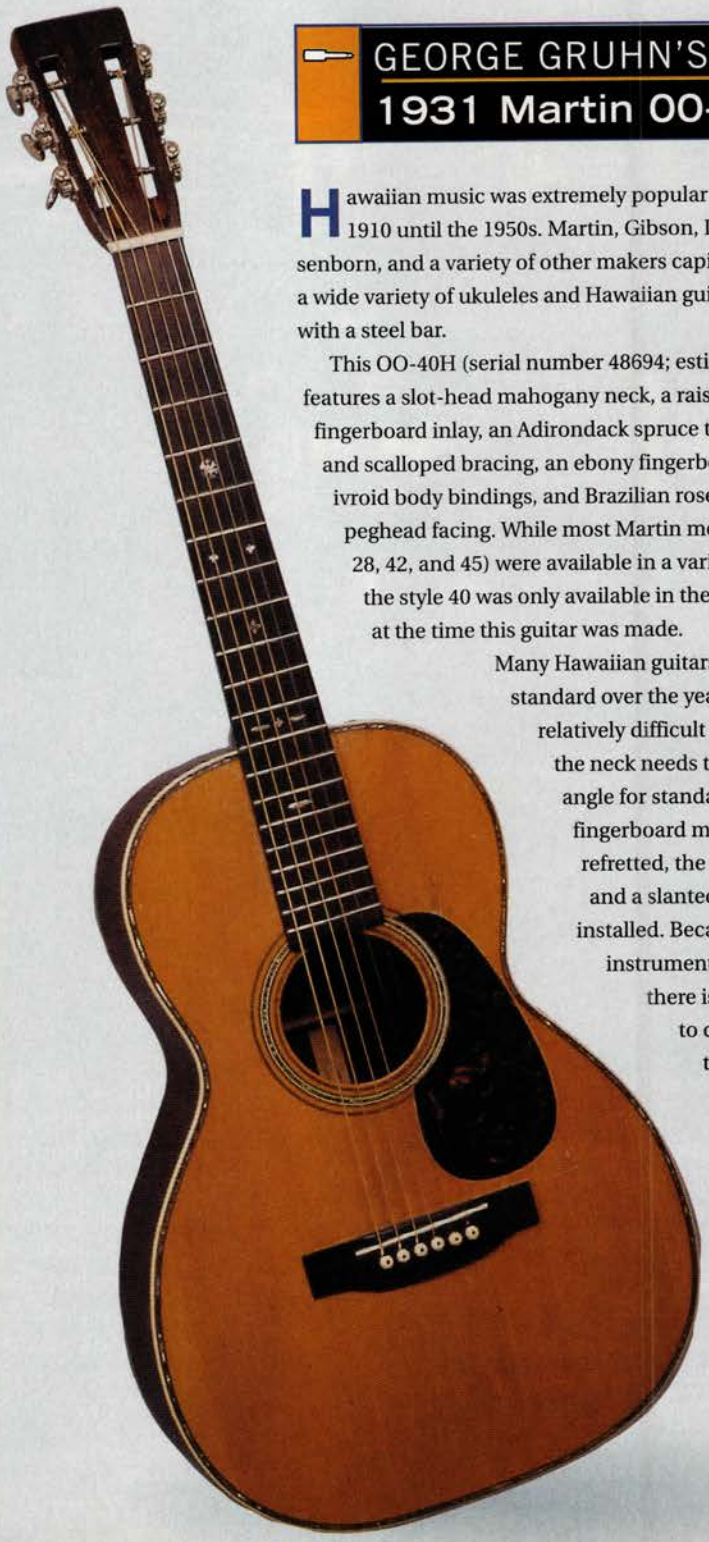
INPUT/OUTPUT

FRETWIRE

Anyone who has made music an integral part of their existence understands that it contributes to a person's overall well-being. And any musician dedicated enough to read *Guitar Player* knows those moments of solace that come from hearing just the right combination of notes—whether it's coming from your guitar, a car stereo, or a performer onstage. Along with your standard exercise and balanced diet, that solace (or outlet or inner-peace or whatever you might call it) is key to healthy living. And, in the midst of an economic downturn and global unrest compounding whatever individual stresses we may have, anything that can help us feel better is a great asset. A brief Internet search for "music" and "healing" revealed everything from



GEORGE GRUHN'S RARE BIRD
1931 Martin 00-40H

Hawaiian music was extremely popular in the United States from 1910 until the 1950s. Martin, Gibson, Dobro, National, Weissenborn, and a variety of other makers capitalized on this trend with a wide variety of ukuleles and Hawaiian guitars designed to be played with a steel bar.

This OO-40H (serial number 48694; estimated value $10,000) features a slot-head mahogany neck, a raised nut, snowflake fingerboard inlay, an Adirondack spruce top with abalone edge trim and scalloped bracing, an ebony fingerboard and bridge, white ivroid body bindings, and Brazilian rosewood back, sides, and peghead facing. While most Martin models (such as the 18, 21, 28, 42, and 45) were available in a variety of different body sizes, the style 40 was only available in the OO-40H Hawaiian version at the time this guitar was made.

Many Hawaiian guitars have been converted to standard over the years, but the conversion is relatively difficult and expensive. Typically, the neck needs to be reset at the correct angle for standard-style playing, the fingerboard must be arched and refretted, the nut requires replacement, and a slanted bridge saddle must be installed. Because a converted instrument is no longer fully original, there is little financial incentive to do this work. But due to their rarity, fine construction, and excellent sound, converted Hawaiian-style instruments have a unique appeal of their own.

—GEORGE GRUHN, *gruhn.com*

GIRL POWER
Chelsea Constable

Two years ago, guitarist Chelsea Constable struggled to perform "Greensleeves" for her local church. Today, the shy 12-year-old can cop the most strenuous Van Halen and Eric Johnson solos note-for-note. She's also the star of a series of MVP instructional videos (mvphomevideo.com), and she has her own signature model from Zion Guitar Technology.

Can you say "overachiever?"—Two years of intense study, a love of metal, supportive parents, and a desire to excel were all Constable needed to gain her frightening chops.

What's your current setup?

My Zion signature guitar, a Hughes and Kettner ZenTera, and SIT strings. I don't use effects, and I get my distortion from the amp.

Is it difficult being an accomplished shredder at such a young age?

Well, everything here in Tennessee is bluegrass, and I feel like I don't fit in. When I was in second grade, I brought an Yngwie Malmsteen tape to school and this boy kept telling on me. Kids my age don't even know about John Petrucci and Joe Satriani, and they're the most talented people who walk on the face of the earth. I also think it's going to be hard for me because the only woman who plays guitar in the style I like is Jennifer Batten. If I could only do one thing, I would try to get more people my age into this type of music.

Do you have a plan for doing that?

I'll probably just play out and try to give concerts at schools. I'm in a band now, but it's kind of strange because the other players are 20 years older than me. I felt sort of shy at first, but they treat me pretty well. I didn't have to audition or anything—the bass player called my dad and asked if I'd be interested in joining the band. I thought it would be a good experience for me.

What's your biggest challenge at the moment?

It's a huge challenge to play Satriani, Petrucci, and Eric Johnson songs. I have to work on them piece-by-piece. It's hard, but I don't like today's music. I don't hear solos at all! —MICHAEL MOLENDA

ANGELS

Michael Houser

The guitarist and singer of jam band Widespread Panic succumbed to pancreatic cancer on August 13. He was 40. In July, Houser revealed to fans through the band's Web site that he had terminal cancer and would not participate in the group's summer tour. His family has established a Michael Houser Music Fund at the Athens Academy in Georgia.

Dave Williams

The charismatic 30-year-old lead singer of Drowning Pool was found dead on the band's tour bus on August 16. The Dallas quartet was on the Ozzfest tour when Williams passed away, and, at press time, the cause of death was being investigated.

Paul Samson

The British heavy metal guitarist lost his battle against cancer on August 9 at his home in Norfolk, England. He was 49. Although Samson never made an impact outside of his homeland, he was lauded as one of the pioneers of the new wave of British metal, and his band Samson was the launching pad for future Iron Maiden vocalist Bruce Dickinson. —MICHAEL MOLENDA

Michael Houser

PHOTOS: ANGELS—MICHAEL WEINTROB

FRETWIRE

new age manifestos to academic roundtable debates to the American Music Therapy Association. Clearly, music is an excellent path to health and healing.

As we pass the year mark on September 11, we have a chance to not only consider the event itself, but how we responded to it, and what helped us continue to function. Directly following the attack, the music industry responded with a glut of benefit concerts, fundraising albums, and tributes to our injured country. An argument could be made that no album was made in the past year that *wasn't* a response on some level to the attacks. Our feature section this month alone is revealing. Though the songs on *Murray Street* were already written, Sonic Youth couldn't get to their studio—which was located right by the towers—to record the album for some time. Bruce Springsteen's first album with the E

SONGCRAFT
Tift Merritt

Roots rocker Tift Merritt plays a mean rhythm guitar, is blessed with a striking voice, and has the enthusiastic support of current singer/songwriter *cause célèbre* and label mate Ryan Adams. But Merritt's tremendous performance chops and fortunate friendships take a back seat to the emotional and well-crafted songs on her solo debut, *Bramble Rose* [Lost Highway]. Here the Tele-wielding writer somewhat begrudgingly ("It's hard to talk about this stuff because it's so *abstract*!") discusses her gift.

When you sit down to write, do you typically have an idea buzzing in your head, or do you rely on your guitar playing to inspire something?

I usually have a piece of something when I sit down to write, but then I have to unearth the rest of it.

How do you decide to turn an idea into a complete song? Do you search through a million notebooks for the right hook, or do you just let inspiration hit you on the head?

If I could put my finger on it, it would be wonderful! I tend to be inspired by a whole range of things, but I look for inspiration that isn't fleeting. There has to be something of substance that I believe in so much that I can't let go of it until I address it and figure it out. *That's* when an idea is worth developing further. I often begin with something that affects me personally, but, by the time I finish the song, it has hopefully been crafted enough that it's no longer attached to a sentiment such as "I had a fight with my boyfriend." That kind of writing is a journal entry, not a song.

Are you ever troubled by commercial considerations—meaning having to choose "hit friendly" elements over emotional truths?

No—I'm lucky enough to be on a label that has never encouraged me to think about hits.

But you must want *to get your songs heard, as well as be considered a successful writer?*

Part of being a musician is communicating with other people, but that's a *human* interest as much as a commercial one. And, anyway, there are so many things to think about when you're writing a song that worrying about issues such as who is going to like it—or which radio station will play it—only serves to obstruct your vision. I want my songs to be credible, and anyone who shares that goal needs to be hard on themselves. You have to write a lot, and learn the differences between what is good and what is bad.

The birth of a song is an extremely private thing, and songs are very fragile in their infancy. If somebody walks in and says the wrong thing, it can shatter the creative process. As a music lover, you hope that you write a song that has true emotion. And, as a musician, you have to put a lot of trust in your emotions because you're dedicating your life to them.

—MICHAEL MOLENDA

"Everything in a song is equal, and all the parts have to work together," says Merritt. "If the lyric is working too hard and the melody isn't working hard enough, the push-pull will kill the song."

SETUPS OF THE STARS
B.B. King

B. B. King's current version of his cherished Lucille was designed in 1999 by the Gibson Custom Shop's Bruce Kunkel. This guitar was a gift to King from Gibson celebrating the King of the Blues' 70th birthday. It's a standard Lucille model with some beautifully-crafted cosmetic enhancements, including custom engraving on the stock 490R and 490T humbuckers and brass truss rod cover, and a pyrography (wood burned) portrait of King on the front. One feature you can't see, however, is an output jack added to the back of the guitar to accommodate King's seated playing style.

Because all of King's Lucilles are based on his favorite ES-355, it's surprising that the frets are .092" wide by .050" tall—much narrower and taller than a vintage ES-355. This Lucille sports an almost straight neck, with a standard Gibson scale length of just under 24 3/4".

The Gibson B.B. King Custom .010-.054 strings measure 4/64" on the treble side, and up to 5/64" on the bass side. The tuners are Grover Rotomatics. The nut is made of corian, and it's cut even and on the high side. By having the high frets and a higher than average nut, King gets a good grip on the strings for his trademark singing vibrato.

—GARY BRAWER

brawer.com

STUDIO LOG
Murderdolls

Tracking "People Hate Me"

Album: *Beyond the Valley of the Murderdolls* [Roadrunner] by the Murderdolls.

Parts: All.

Guitarist: Joey Jordison.

Guitars: Gibson SG (loaded with EMG 81 pickups) and silverburst Les Paul Custom.

Amp: Marshall JCM 2000 TSL 100.

Strings: GHS Boomers, .010 set.

Effects: Electro-Harmonix Micro Synth, MXR Phase 90, and Dunlop CryBaby.

Tuning: Standard.

Creative Concept: "We're serious about not being serious," says Jordison. "We're a straight-up rock and roll band and we make music that's packed with heavy riffs. I've always been into the late '70s New York glam scene—as well as bands like the Sex Pistols, the Ramones, Mötley Crüe, and Twisted Sister—so the goal was to produce songs that are so easily digestible and catchy that the audience is singing along by the second chorus.

"Sonically, I wanted the whole record to sound crystal clear, but still raw and aggressive. I didn't polish things up too much, because I didn't want to lose the grittiness. If a track doesn't have a certain vibe, it gets lost—it just turns into another song on the album. I wanted each song to really jump out at you.

"'People Hate Me' definitely has a new twist. It's heavy, fun to sing along with, free spirited, and fun. Not everything in this day and age has to be about tortured childhoods and 'feel my pain.' But it seems like every band coming out now is wearing baggy pants and sportswear, tuning down to at least *D*, and playing songs with soft verses and screaming choruses. I absolutely hate it—it's so sterile. And, guitar-wise, there's way more to life than one string!"

—MICHAEL MOLENDA

PHOTOS: SONGCRAFT—TONY BAKER; SETUPS: GARY BRAWER

INPUT/OUTPUT

FRETWIRE

Street Band since 1984, *The Rising*, is a dedication to those whose lives were directly changed. Bursts of radical artistic expression tend to follow cataclysmic events, and as the "war on terrorism" continues, that fact is rather comforting. We're existing in a historic moment, and therefore the stuff we create, discover, and absorb holds even more power.

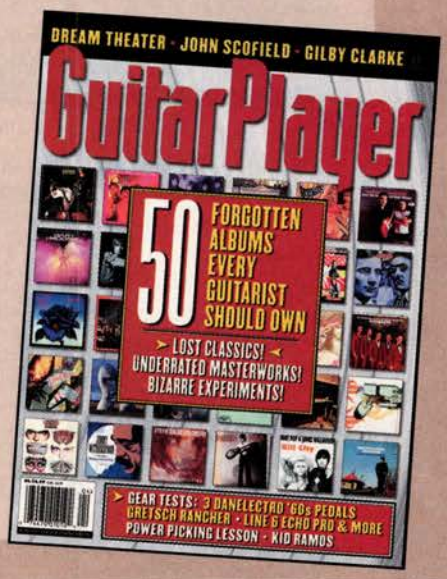
As more and more well-thought-out expressions of strength and hope (or fear and frustration) see the light of day, the old eco-cliché "think globally and act locally" springs to mind. While our fear of the unknown—and the possibility of some level of global war—continues, we must do whatever we can to relieve some of the stress, and maintain a healthy outlook. I submit one of the best ways to do so is to create, enjoy, and share our favorite art form. —EMILY PASTEN

MY FAVORITE *GUITAR PLAYER*
Earl Slick

GuitarPlayer 35th ANNIVERSARY

"The April 2002 issue that heralded '50 Forgotten Albums Every Guitarist Should Own' was pretty amazing. I was reminded of a lot of records I had in my vinyl collection that I loved, but had forgotten about. The issue brought back a lot of memories. I'm hoping the feature gets new guitarists hip to music they haven't heard, as well as make them aware of different players. Influences are key, and I don't think many young players go back far enough. Stories like this, however, can open the door to a whole new world of possibilities."

—EARL SLICK, AUGUST 2002



AUCTION BLOCK **Will Ray's eBay Strategies**

AUCTION ITEM: **1940s Kay Lap Steel** WINNING BID: **$181.56**

I recently switched accountants, and it turns out my new tax man, Keith, used to play bass for a well-known punk band in the 80s. While his eyes were focused on my 1099s, mine were drawn towards the guitars hanging on his office wall. A lap steel caught my attention because it was incredibly old and cool looking. Keith knew little about it—except that he had picked it up real cheap a few years ago—and he didn't want to part with it, either. I couldn't blame him.

But, sure enough, I found one just like his on eBay after doing a word search for "Kay." This baby was made in the late '40s, and it's unofficially called "The Empire State Steel" because of its resemblance to the skyscraper of the same name. This art-deco-styled steel sports Kluson Deluxe tuners, a contoured body, a powerful single-coil pickup, volume and tone controls, and actual frets (instead of painted ones). The seller obviously didn't know anything about lap steels, because this find was auctioned as an electric guitar.

The seller's shipping estimate seemed high, and when I suggested something lower, I suddenly stopped receiving e-mail responses. After two weeks, I assumed he had changed his mind. Then, out of the blue, he sent an e-mail explaining he had been out of town due to a death in his family. The exchange reminded me to always exercise patience and courtesy when dealing with sellers. In this case, my frustration could have prompted me to say something stupid and blow the deal. I'm glad I didn't, because this steel has tone for days! It was also loved by its original owner—battle scars from years of blissful picking adorn the lower body, and the initials "SSN" are carved into the back of the headstock. If this baby could talk, the tales it could tell!

Will Ray can be contacted at willr@hellecasters.com. Be sure to check out his latest solo CD, Mojo Blues *[Wild Rose Records].*

Mudhoney

"We've been through so many ups and downs as a band, the fact we're still playing because we *like* to play is pretty cool," says Turner.

If Mudhoney had a dime for every time their name appeared next to the phrase "pioneering grunge rockers," they would be millionaires a few times over. They're not, but the recent *Since We've Become Translucent* [Sub Pop] keeps alive the 15-year-old band's gospel of punk+garage+fuzz=Mudhoney. Here, guitarist Steve Turner talks about performing in a veteran band that has de-emphasized its career plan.

You've said that "Mudhoney isn't our life anymore." What changed?

When we hit our mid-30s, real life started getting in the way [*laughs*]. We all have jobs now, and Mudhoney is almost like a hobby. Our drummer Dan is a stay-at-home dad and Guy, our bass player, just finished nursing school. For *Since We've Become Translucent*, we're only going to tour a little bit—a ten-day trip to Europe and some weekend gigs in the states.

So you don't feel the need to prove yourselves anymore?

No. We used to try and piss off the audience. That attitude has gone away some, but we haven't necessarily replaced it with, "Let's make the crowd happy."

Have you revamped your live setup at all?

I've always used Fender Mustangs—a '66 and an early '70s model—but lately I've been using a Danelectro DC reissue. I've always liked the way crappy guitars play. I'm still using the same amp—a '65 Fender Super Reverb. I love the old Electro-Harmonix pedals, but sometimes they work and sometimes they don't.

How have your fans changed throughout the past 15 years?

Right now, we've apparently lost the 20-year-olds. What we get are little kids who are just getting into rock music—half of them are wearing Kurt Cobain t-shirts—and old-time Mudhoney fans in their mid-30s. It's funny—we've got the kids and we've got the old people!

—DARRIN FOX

PHOTOS: AUCTION BLOCK—WILL RAY; PERFORMANCE NOTES: LANCE HAMMOND

I COULD COME HOME AND DRINK AFTER A STRESSFUL DAY, INSTEAD OF PLAYING GUITAR. BUT THEN MY WIFE WOULD NEVER COMPLIMENT ME ON HOW MUCH MY DRINKING HAS IMPROVED.

WWW.TAYLORGUITARS.COM

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New Gear

By Kevin Owens

STARR LABS

The Z6-SP ($2,595)—a completely tuneable, mappable and programmable MIDI controller—features a touch-sensitive fretboard, right-hand triggering, a 4-way joystick, six pressure- and velocity-sensitive trigger pads, and six rotary pots for controlling hardware and software synths and MIDI gear. **Starr Labs**, 1717 Fifth Ave., San Diego, CA 92101; (619) 233-6715; starrlabs.com.

1

1. TASCAM

The Pocketstudio 5 ($599), a portable 4-track recorder with an internal MIDI synth module, records to Compact Flash media cards. It also has 100 built-in effects for instruments and vocals, a USB port, and a built-in condenser mic and a headset mic. The mini workstation will run for two hours on two AA batteries, and mixdowns can be done internally to the mp3 format. **Tascam**, 7733 Telegraph Rd., Montebello, CA 90640; (323) 726-0303; tascam.com.

2. MEGA

The 30-watt PT30R amp ($180) features a tube preamp section, footswitchable high-gain tube overdrive, reverb, an effects loop, and an input for a CD player. Housed in a durable, carpet-covered cabinet, the PT30R sports solid-aluminum control knobs and a steel grille to protect its custom-designed 10" speaker. **Mega Amplifiers**, dist. by Guitar Jones, 18214 Parthenia, Notrhridge, CA 961325; (866) 790-2950; megaamps.com.

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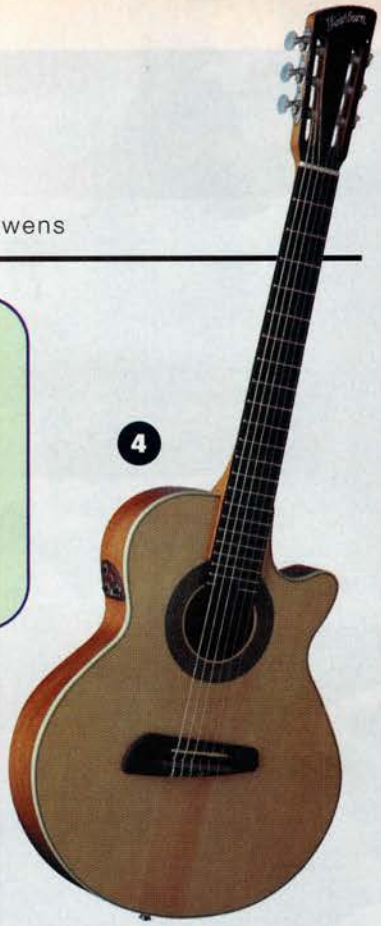
3. PICKBOY

When desiging their dozens of styles of exotic ($5 each) and professional and designer picks (75¢ each), Pickboy keeps four things in mind: tonal response, picking harmonics, picking noise, and grip. Materials range from rosewood to carbon graphite, and models vary in thickness, shape, and design. **Pickboy**, dist. by Brooklyn Gear, 20 Jay St., Ste. 1002, Brooklyn, NY 11201; (877) 700-4327; brooklyngear.com.



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4. WASHBURN

The 25-1/2" scale, nylon-string NV100 acoustic-electric classical guitar ($1,999) features a hollow, one-piece mahogany body with a spruce top and a bolt-on neck with locking pitch adjustment. The NV100 utilizes an under-saddle tape condenser mic with a B-Band preamp, and has separate mic and mix outputs. Available in black, natural, natural matte, and vintage sunburst. **Washburn**, 444 E. Courtland, Mundelein, IL 60060; (847) 949-0444; washburn.com.

GATOR

Gator's new combo amp transporters ($139 to $154) feature a 1/2" wooden interior frame covered in 20mm military-spec foam, protected with 600-denier ballistic nylon. Designed to fit most single- and twin-speaker amps, the transporters have a built-in pull out handle and roller blade-style wheels. There's also an exterior accessory pocket for cables and footswitches. **Gator Cases**, 3421 North Lakeview Dr., Ste. 138, Lutz, FL 33549; (813) 221-4191; gatorcases.com.

"Sometimes I rip so hard that my whole hand gets stuck in the soundhole." — Ani DiFranco, Feb. '96, *GP*

DANELECTRO

The pedal pushers at Danelectro have turned back the clock again with the release of two new stompboxes. The Spring King ($199), a three-spring reverb unit, features three chickenhead knobs (volume, tone, and reverb) and a foot-saving Kick Pad that simulates the sound angst-filled rockers get from kicking their amps. The Reel Echo ($199, pictured) offers '50s-style tape echo without the tape. Features include a Warble control, up to 1.5 seconds of delay time, a Lo-Fi control that rolls off the high frequencies of each successive repeat, and a tube/solid-state tone switch. **Danelectro**, Box 5030, San Clemente, CA 92674; (949) 498-9854; danelectro.com.

5

5. BSM

Available for the first time in North America are the HS ($200), HS Custom ($210), and RM ($210) treble boosters from Germany's BSM. The HS is a reproduction of the Hornby Skewes booster used by Ritchie Blackmore in Deep Purple. (The HS Custom comes with a side-mounted volume control.) The RM (pictured) is identical to the Dallas Rangemaster pedal that Eric Clapton used in Cream and the Bluesbreakers. All three units come with a five-year warranty. **BSM**, dist. by European Musical Imports, Box 68, Hillsdale, NJ 07642; (201) 594-0817; europeanmusical.com.

6. VOX

The limited edition Pathfinder 15 SMR (Super Mini Reverb) mini-stack ($399) features a 15-watt head and a matching 2x10 vertical cabinet with specially voiced Celestion speakers. In addition to gain, volume, treble, and bass controls, the Pathfinder offers spring reverb with a depth control, and tremolo with speed and depth controls. **Vox Amplification**, 316 South Service Rd., Melville, NY 11747; (516) 333-9100; vox-amps.co.uk.

7. LINE 6

The new Variax ($1,399) is the first guitar to incorporate Line 6's digital modeling technology. Using one knob and a 5-way selector, the player can switch between the sounds of more than two-dozen acoustic and electric guitars, as well as resonator, banjo, and electric sitar. Instead of conventional magnetic pickups, the Variax features a hexaphonic bridge pickup that converts string vibrations into digital signals, and then back to analog, enabling you to plug into to any amp. **Line 6**, 29901 Agoura Rd., Agoura, CA 91301; (818) 575-3600; line6.com.

New Gear is based on info from manufacturers. Coverage does not imply endorsement by Guitar Player. *All prices and specs are subject to change. Manufacturers: Submit your press release and photo with list price information to New Gear,* Guitar Player, *2800 Campus Dr., San Mateo, CA 94403.*

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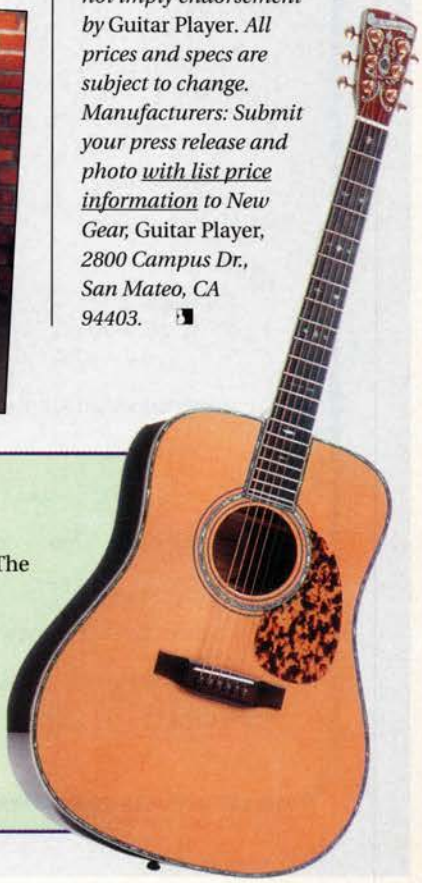
SAGA

The recently redesigned line of Blueridge acoustic guitars includes six models ranging in price from $395 to $1,295. The Historic series BR-180 ($1,295) features a sitka spruce top, rosewood back and sides with abalone pearl on all borders, an ebony fretboard and bridge, and a fast-action mahogany neck with an adjustable trussrod. **Saga Musical Instruments**, 137 Utah Ave., South San Francisco, CA 94080; (650) 588-5558; sagamusic.com.



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"I add a jazz background to my singer/songwriter approach to composition," says Stern. "After all, I was *born* a guitar player, and I can't let go of my love for improvisation."

Leni Stern

Drones for Peace

By Michael Molenda

Any musician who uses his or her gift to help the nation come to terms with September 11 is an angel. Having said that, the deluge of post-tragedy works have proven it's a risky business addressing *real* horror and loss through pop songs. The constructs of words and music, verses and choruses, can compromise even the most sincere artistic intentions by being too *Sesame Street* (such as Paul McCartney singing "Talkin' 'bout freedom"), too righteous, or too gruesome.

The pure sound of instrumental music, however, can express complicated emotions without agitating the listener with an inappropriate word or phrase. Even better, the individual's imagination is free to interpret how the textures and melodies rouse their feelings.

For Leni Stern, the healing started with a groove. The New York-based guitarist,

PHOTO: EBET ROBERTS

singer, songwriter, and orchestrator didn't conceive her *Finally the Rain Has Come* [LSR] as a remembrance of September 11, but songs such as "For Peace to Come" were formed by her perceptions of living with the aftermath.

"That song was inspired by this wild tabla and drum improvisation between Zakir Hussain and Keith Carlock that, to me, expressed the feeling of September 2001 in New York," says Stern. "They just started playing, and I rolled tape."

However, it took months for Stern to analyze the drum track and develop a song form. "I didn't really know what to do with the track at first," she says, "but I knew I couldn't *not* put it on the album—it was just too amazing. Eventually, I surmised the form was basically a pattern of four- and eight-bar phrases, and I wrote a chord progression with my Martin that fit the rhythmic structure. Then I used my JamMan to loop and layer drones in *E, B, A,* and *D* that fade in and out of the progression. That was the 'peace' part—a big, calming drone."

The tabla rhythms and drones—as well as Stern's study of Indian music and her love for guitarist John McLaughlin's western/eastern hybrids—inspired additional Indian textures. "I decided to begin the song with an improvisation in the style of an Indian *alap*—which is a rhythmless outline of the feeling of a song," explains Stern. "I thought that was the best way to introduce this vibe of peace and calm and people connecting. That was something I needed at the time of the tragedy, and I felt that was the right message for the song to deliver. Of course, there's no guitar tradition in Indian music, but they have a 4,000-year-old improvisational technique that fascinates me. There are all these embellishments, and yet their choice of notes—and how they'll use a single interval throughout a piece—are very disciplined. It's a step further from modal improvisation, but I use their school of improvising within a normal western context—which is *my* tradition."

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Guitars: Fender Custom Shop Strat, Martin JM acoustic.

Amps: '63 Fender Deluxe and blackface Princeton.

FX: Lexicon JamMan, Boss volume pedal.

Strings: Fender, gauged .010-.046.

When the tabla/drum groove enters after Stern's intro, "For Peace to Come" builds and intertwines thematic layers with sitar and acoustic parts performed by Larry Saltzman, and fingerpicked lines played by former *GP* associate editor (and current Norah Jones sideman) Adam Levy.

"We spent one Sunday just finding ways of creating textures with guitars," says Stern. "It was like arranging an orchestra—you know, lines coming in and lines coming out—except that we really didn't plan anything. I just said, 'Let's take all the guitars we have and see if we can do something with this beautiful percussion duet.' We were just soloing along. It was a long process, and later I picked the parts that best fit the song."

The work also features violin lines by Jenny Scheinman and ends with what Stern calls "hillbilly" vocal harmonies. "I added the violin to show that we must remain calm in the face of the anger and destructive power of terrorism," says Stern. "And the outro harmonies bring in this truly hopeful American element. With all the textures and emotional layers, arranging this song was like making a film. I found myself giving the players acting instructions more than musical feedback!"

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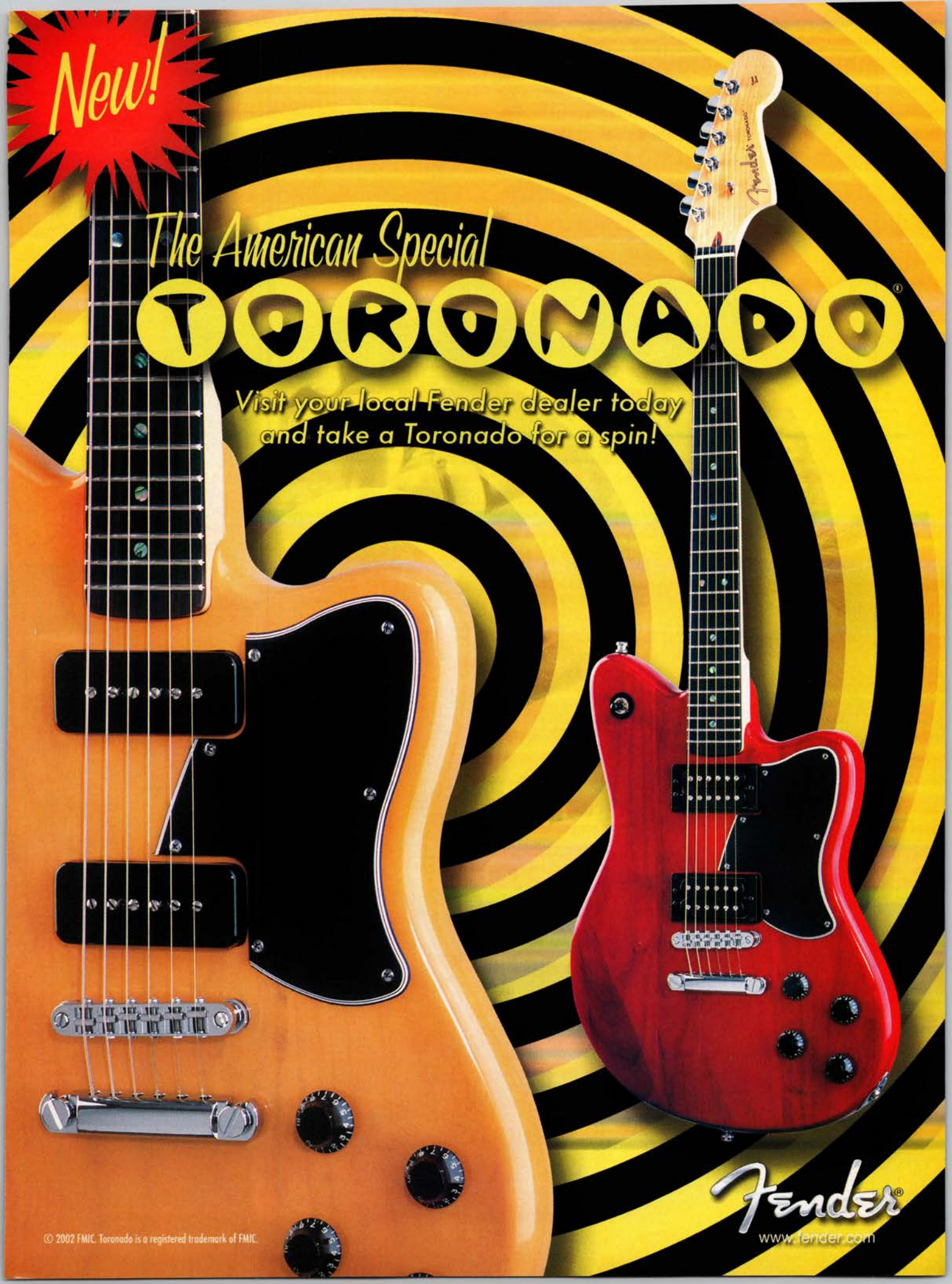
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"I have a real resonance with West African guitar players," says DiFranco, "particularly Baaba Maal, Mansour Seck, and Ali Farka Touré. I'm drawn to their meditative, cyclical riffs and the roundness of their grooves."

Ani DiFranco

Energy Exchanger

By Andy Ellis

"An audience can generate amazing energy," says dervish fingerpicker and radical folkie Ani DiFranco. "I feed off it, I love it, I resent it, I abhor it, I rely on it, and I try to return it. That's what this new record is all about—exchanging energy."

Released on DiFranco's own Righteous Babe label, the live *So Much Shouting, So Much Laughter* finds DiFranco and her fans engaged in an intense game of give-and-take. The double disc features songs culled from two years of touring, and melds the urgency of punk with the musical sophistication of New York jazz. Backed by a crack horn band,

PHOTO: SCOT FISHER

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Ani DiFranco

DiFranco assaults her Alvarez flat-tops with a rocker's abandon, alternately screaming, moaning, whispering, and crooning her provocative lyrics over jagged riffs and funky grooves.

DiFranco bases many of her churning progressions on alternate tunings. "I've got dozens,"

CONTINUED ON PAGE 43

Folk Art

Onstage, DiFranco slams an Alvarez Yairi DY62 dreadnought, three WY1 concert-size flat-tops, and an Avante acoustic baritone. The Avante has a Fishman saddle pickup, and the others use stock Alvarez electronics. She also strums a Martin Backpacker with a Fishman saddle pickup and a Cromwell 4-string tenor guitar (tuned *A, D, A, D*) with a Fishman archtop pickup. Occasionally, she'll play a sunburst Hamer Artist Custom through a 100-watt Rivera Sedona combo.

DiFranco uses D'Addario strings. The WY1s, DY62, and Martin sport EJ17 phosphor bronze medium sets, while the baritone and tenor have custom sets gauged .070-.016 and .045-.016, respectively. When DiFranco flatpicks, she wields a large, triangular D'Andrea, and for distortion, she uses a volume pedal to feed her guitar signal into a Tech 21 SansAmp.

"Ani has too many tunings to list them all," says Reg Dickinson, DiFranco's longtime guitar tech. "But along with *DADGAD*, she likes these four [see chart]. She'll capo these tunings and also transpose their formulas to the baritone." —AE

Selected DiFranco Tunings

6	5	4	3	2	1
E	B	B	G	B	D
D	A	C	G	A	D
G	G	C	G	C	D
E	A	D	G	A	D

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 40

Ani DiFranco

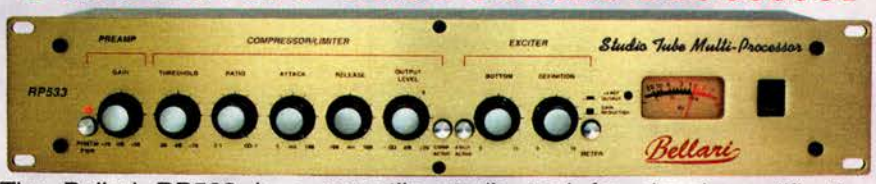
she says. "My guitar tech, Reg Dickinson, helps me keep track of them. I can name the strings when I alter standard tuning, but I play a lot of baritone guitar, and that's where I get lost. For baritone alternate tunings, we've developed our own language based on what we call '*C* standard' [*C, F, B♭, E♭, G, C*], which is regular tuning, but down three whole-steps. Because I often use a capo with my tunings, the intonation can get funny as I move up the neck—especially on the baritone. Reg has become an artist at compensating for these discrepancies. The first few times I perform a new song, he'll listen for sour chords, and then figure out which strings to detune by a few cents. He feeds me carefully prepared guitars all night."

Touring and recording with an electric ensemble posed a new set of challenges for DiFranco. "When I was a solo performer," she elaborates, "I worked with three tools: my voice, my guitar, and the silence around those two things. But with a six-piece band, suddenly there was a wall of sound onstage. As a result, the band got lots of harping from the chick singer: 'Dynamics, dynamics, dynamics!' I discovered that by encouraging improvisation, the arrangements would stay fresh, *and* my fellow musicians would listen more closely to my guitar. My acoustic has taught me that it's not about a quiet verse and a loud chorus, but an organic ebb and flow, and that's what we sought on this record."

In keeping with her strong DIY ethic, DiFranco single-handedly mixed the 23 songs on *So Much*. "We went right from the board onto 16 tracks of ADAT," she says. "They're not shiny, pretty recordings, but I think the rawness contributes to the energy. I couldn't possibly listen to a whole tour's worth of tapes, so I developed an intuitive song-selection process. I'd look at the boxes and go, 'Phoenix, that was a fun show,' and check out a few songs. When one caught my ear, I'd mix it quickly. When you're alone in the studio, the biggest challenge is to stay objective. To get a fresh perspective, I developed a rhythm of setting levels and compressors—getting the tracks to a basic point—and then putting the mix through speakers located *outside* the control room. While the song was playing, I'd roam around the house and ask myself, 'What does this need to sound like a record?' When I had the answer, I'd go back and finish the mix."

So Much is DiFranco's 12th independent album in as many years. In addition to providing the world with edgy music, the feisty guitarist has also proved that it's possible to have a career on one's own terms. "I've created my own world as an alternative to being owned by the self-serving, cutthroat music business," she says. "It has been a frustrating, debilitating, and exhausting journey, but also more gratifying than I could ever say. It's a thrill to live your dream."

Tube Lover's Tube Studio Processor



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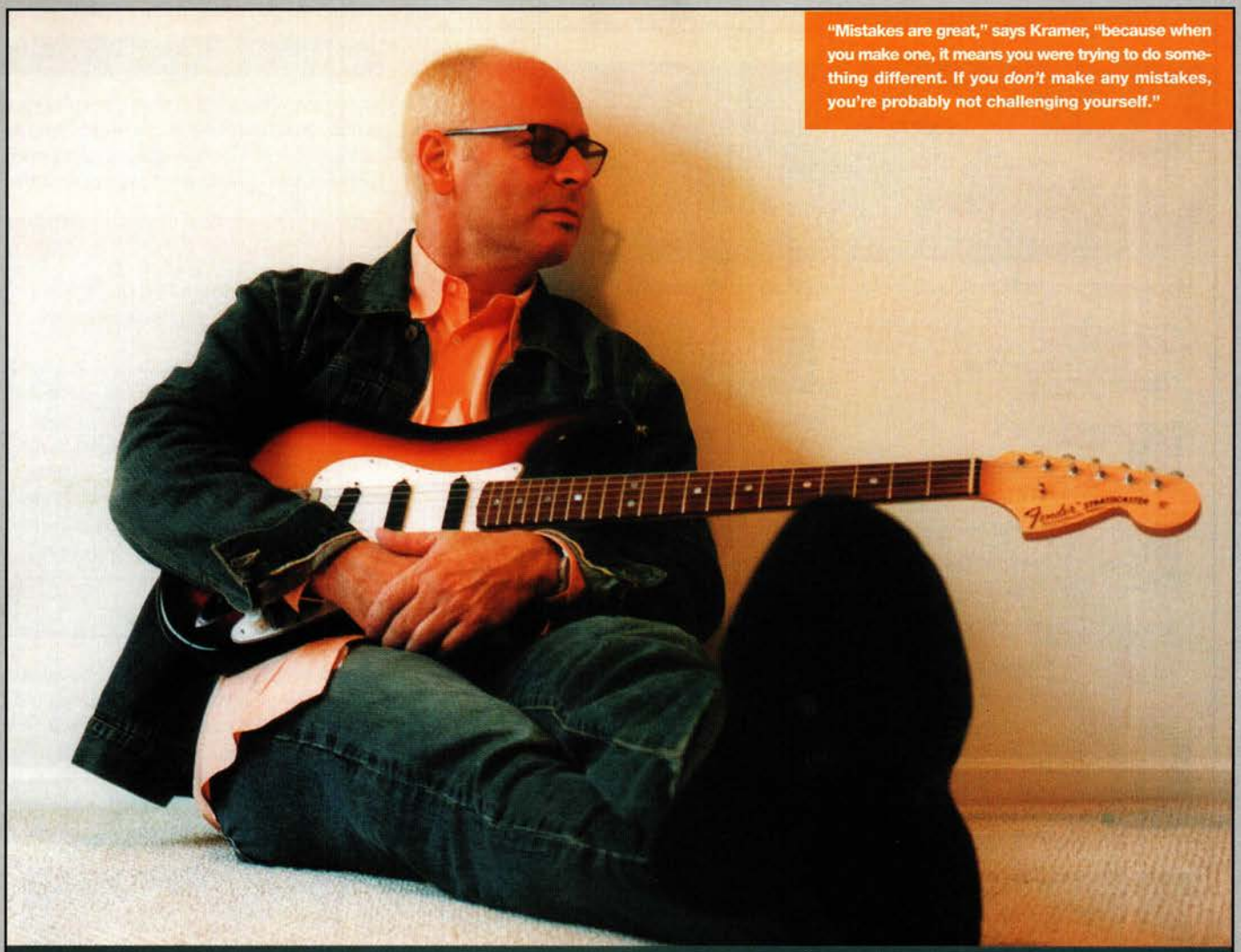


"Mistakes are great," says Kramer, "because when you make one, it means you were trying to do something different. If you *don't* make any mistakes, you're probably not challenging yourself."

Wayne Kramer

Growing Up Young

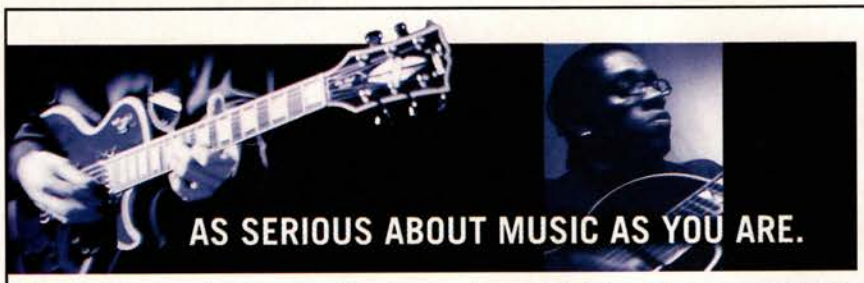
By Michael Molenda

Once described as "a 19-year-old punk on a meth power trip" during the crazed years of the MC5 (1969-'72), Wayne Kramer's loud and ferocious playing was a seminal influence on future punks, garage rockers, and heavy metalists. Art also imitated life, as Kramer's rebel persona veered into drug problems and a two-year prison term for dealing cocaine. Slightly less dangerous adventures included his early '80s tenure in Was (Not Was), teaming with iconic junkie Johnny Thunders in the band Gang War, and starting MuscleTone Records in 2001. Kramer's first solo release in five years, *Adult World* [MuscleTone], finds the sonic rude boy evolving, but not surrending his edge.

"What I find beautiful about the electric guitar hasn't changed since I was a young man," he says. "I love how the overtones of a distorted guitar produce this massive, orchestral roar. You can play just two notes—say, fifths—and it sounds like the Wall of Jericho! So, although my technique has evolved, I've stuck with the tone I discovered years ago—which is a combination of Albert Collins, Pete Townshend, and something a little fuzzier."

True to his word, *Adult World* is an aural thrill ride of raw and unprocessed guitar sounds. But Kramer is far from a vintage tone freak or a technical Luddite. He's a fervent home-studio disciple and an experienced Pro Tools user. It's simply that he chooses not to shape his guitar sounds with plug-ins.

"There's a time and place for signal processing," he explains. "I love noise—and I appreciate people who make their guitars sound like windshield wipers—but I want to hear the notes the guitar is playing. To me, the musical idea is more important than the sonic idea. What becomes more and more



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Wayne Kramer

important to me as time goes on is playing a melody. Now that doesn't mean something like "Mary Had a Little Lamb"—although that's a perfectly fine melody. A melody can be harmonized in a way that's unorthodox and non-traditional, and you can use notes that don't sound right. It's like what they said about Thelonious Monk—'He plays the music *wrong*.' It's all about how you hear something in your mind's ear."

As a seminal player with a style honed over more than 30 years, Kramer avoids the trap of

Adult Toys

Guitars: Danelectro 56-U2, Fender Strat and Tele, Fernandes acoustic, Gibson Firebird.

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– Emile Menasché, Guitar World, February 2002

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Wayne Kramer

repetition by actively seeking new directions. "The challenge is to not play the same thing I played the last time," he says. "A lot of the time, I'll just start playing and not have a clue about what I'm doing. I like that approach, because something might come out that I didn't plan. That's where the advantage of working in my own studio really pays off—the very first idea I get when the muse visits me is captured in a way that can make it all the way to the finished album. When I come up with something fresh, I feel like I've had a good day at the office."

Although he is certainly one of the genre's forefathers, Kramer's commitment to musical growth often puts him at odds with the current renaissance of garage rock. "Some of those bands are friends of mine, and they know I appreciate the enthusiasm and spirit they bring to the world of music," says Kramer. "But I'm not buying it. Much of the scene is about fashion, and none of the bands are playing anything I haven't been hearing for 30 years—it's the same three chords played in the same way they've been played forever. If you want to sustain a career you have to sing your *own* blues. Look at Jack White [of the White Stripes]—he put everything in the Vego-matic, mixed it up, and came up with a new dish. I'd say, forget about the haircuts and belt buckles, and find your own sound."

"Wicked, Wicked Fun"
— Guitar Player, EDITORS' PICK award, May 2002

"Destined to be a Classic"
— Guitar World, June 2002

"An Enormous Number of Sonic Possibilities"
— Guitar One, ONE award, June 2002

"There's Nothing Like It on the Market"
— Keyboard, KEY BUY award, April 2002

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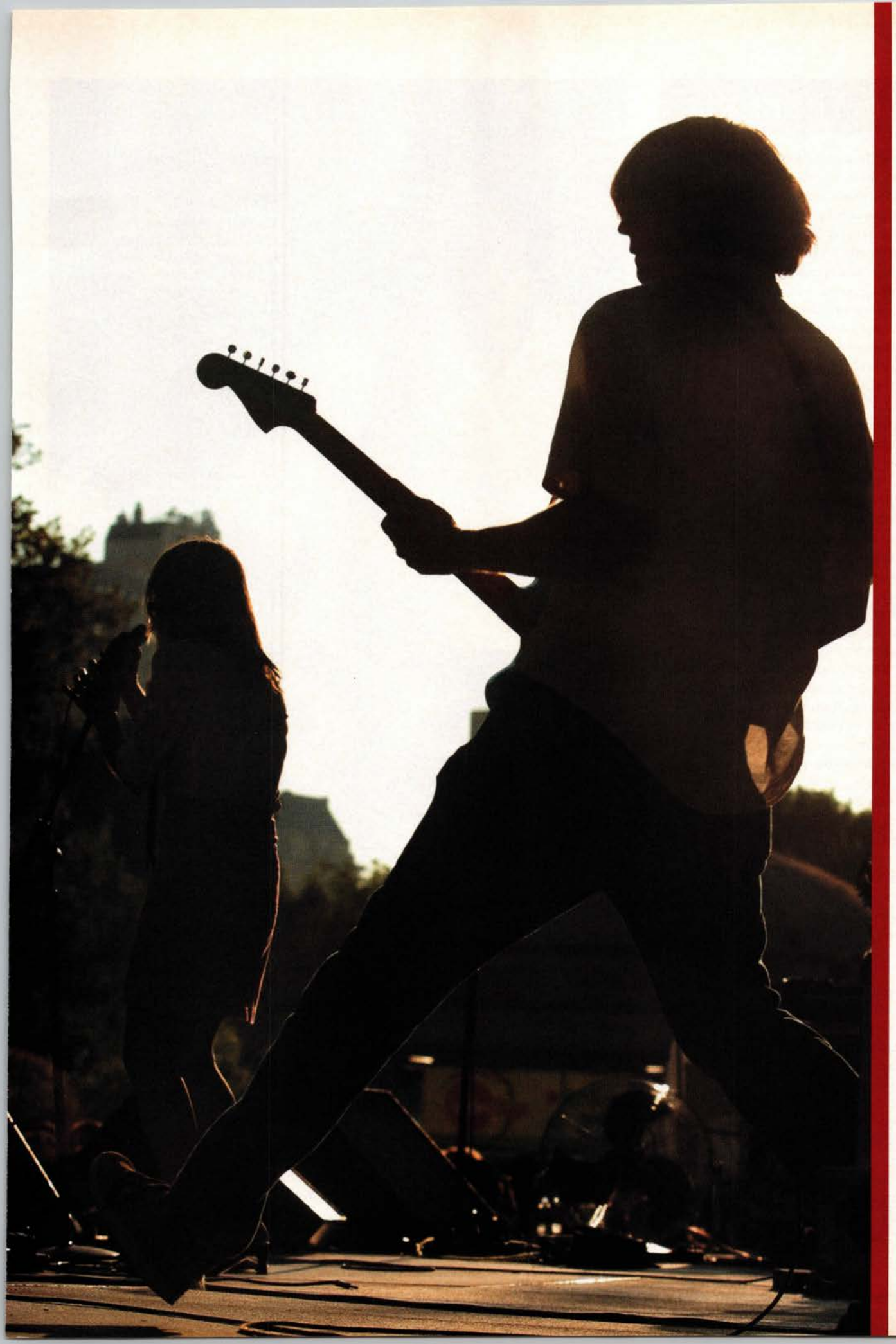
Sonic Youth Survives Ground Zero, Adds a Member, and Refines the Art of Noise

Chaos THEORISTS

They say you have to know the rules before you can break them. If that's true, few bands know the rules better than Sonic Youth. Step into Echo Canyon, Sonic Youth's New York studio, and broken rules litter the floor like so many snapped guitar strings and shattered drumsticks. It is in this sound lab that Sonic Youth pulls off the freakish

By Jude Gold

PHOTOGRAPH BY RAHAV SEGEV

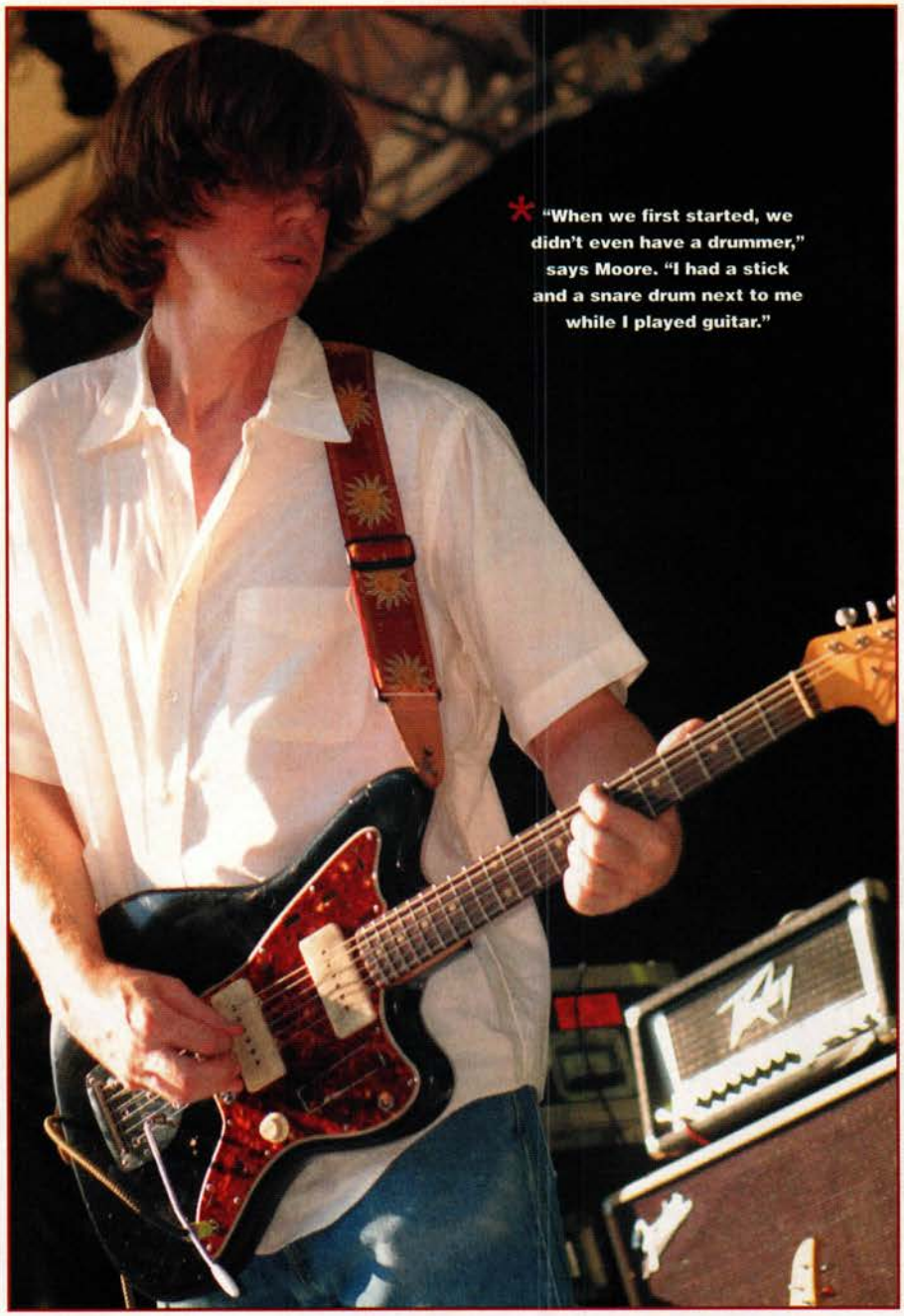


experiments that most bands wouldn't—and probably *shouldn't*—dare attempt. By weaving sheets of feedback into symphonic passages, extending pop songs well past the ten-minute mark with noisy epilogues, playing guitar with random objects, rewiring stompboxes, and torturing amps until the tubes melt, Sonic Youth has once again recorded a mutant-rock masterpiece that reduces the rulebook to confetti.

The band's new album, *Murray Street* [Geffen], is the second in a trilogy for Sonic Youth—and it got off to an inspired start. Producer, multi-instrumentalist, and self-confessed "noisenick" Jim O'Rourke had just joined the band, expanding Sonic Youth to a quintet for the first time since Thurston Moore, Lee Ranaldo, and Kim Gordon formed the group in 1981. Everyone was eager to start tracking, and O'Rourke was already putting in long hours at Echo Canyon, often sleeping there after late nights of pre-production. It wasn't an alarm clock, however, that jarred him awake one sunny September morning last year—it was the horrific cacophony created when, nearly 100 stories above his head, the first jetliner slammed into the World Trade Center.

"The studio was just two short blocks away," recalls O'Rourke, still too traumatized to speak about that day in anything above a whisper. "A jet engine fell from the sky, and landed on Murray Street within eyeshot of the studio's front window."

Soon thereafter, the towers came down. Lower Manhattan was closed off and *Murray Street* was derailed indefinitely. But while O'Rourke may need the rest of his life to process the terror he survived last September 11, he and the rest of Sonic Youth *were* finally able to get back into their studio. Here, Moore, Ranaldo, and O'Rourke trace the evolution of one of the most exciting and inspired albums in Sonic Youth's 21-year career.



* "When we first started, we didn't even have a drummer," says Moore. "I had a stick and a snare drum next to me while I played guitar."

*

Why expand the Sonic Youth lineup?

Ranaldo: On the last few records, Kim has been playing more and more guitar with Thurston and myself, and while we were really into mining the three-guitar vein, we started to miss the bottom-end her bass playing provided. Jim—whom we've worked with since the early '90s—mixed our last album, *NYC Ghosts and Flowers*, and also tracked a few bass lines on it. His parts came out so great, we invited him to go out on tour with us and play them live. When it came time to do *Murray Street*, we decided to involve him entirely as a band member.

Jim, how do you like being in one the most influential and well-respected rock bands of the last two decades?

O'Rourke: I don't really think about it. I just keep a respectful distance from the other members [*laughs*]. It's funny, when I was about 20 years old and was exploring prepared guitar approaches, people would often tell me, "You'd love Sonic Youth—they use drumsticks on their guitars!" Truth is, compared to the wild guitar players I was into—such as Keith Rowe and Derek Bailey—Sonic Youth sounded fairly normal to me! Keith Rowe, for example, doesn't even play notes—he plays sound. He uses the *kitchen* on his guitar. He'll have a hollowbody lying on a table full of brushes, sticks, fans, motors, and magnets—all of which he'll apply in various ways.

What was your role on Murray Street*?*

O'Rourke: I played bass on two-thirds of the songs and guitar on almost all of them. Actually, Lee was laughing in rehearsal, because I'm often playing bass live, which means he sometimes has to play *my* guitar parts. It was the first time he has ever had to play parts that weren't his own. And although I'm credited as the album's producer, I actually acted more as an engineer. The album's production was a truly democratic effort by the band.

How did the events of September 11 effect the album?

PHOTO: RAHAV SEGEV

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Ranaldo: To tell you the truth, it was mostly logistical. Except for the vocals, everything was already written, and we were just about to start seriously tracking the songs. But after September 11, we couldn't get into our studio for two and a half months. When we finally could go back, it was a matter of getting past National Guardsmen on every corner. We had to show paperwork and prove we worked in the building. When we eventually got to the tracking process, however, we had a bunch of electrical problems with our gear, so we didn't start tracking *Murray Street* until the first week of January 2002.

What is Echo Canyon like?

Moore: It has professional recording equipment, but any professional engineer would go in there and say, "Forget this!" Echo Canyon is in a building where other bands are crashing around above and below you, and soundproofing is minimal. One time, Pavement was in the building doing sessions with a producer who had worked with Radiohead, and the guy was like, "Are you kidding me? I can't work here." But it doesn't bother us. Our last two records were entirely recorded here, and with all those bands as our soundtrack. You can't actually hear them bleeding through our tracks, but that would be something I'd like to try sometime. I think it could be hip.

How did you track Murray Street?

Ranaldo: We have an old 16-track, 2" Studer machine and a Pro Tools rig that are pretty much integrated. We recorded about half the stuff analog and the other half digital, and we mixed down to an old Ampex half-inch machine. Pro Tools is an amazing editing tool, but we still do plenty of editing where we're physically cutting tape, which I love to do because you arrive at things differently that way. Plus, the analog domain is where our final masters end up, and if you're mixing a song to tape like we do—in sections using a vintage Neve console—it's sometimes actually *more* expedient to use a razor blade than it is to use Pro Tools.

Are you guys still playing Fender Jazzmasters?

Moore: Yes, I primarily use a black one from the late '60s. I bought it on the road somewhere after we had all of our guitars—about 40 of them—ripped off in Orange County, California. We also lost all of our amps, drums, rack gear, and personal effects.

Jim O'Rourke on Prepared Guitar

It's not that Jim O'Rourke can't play guitar in the "conventional" manner, it's just that the producer and newest member of Sonic Youth would rather attack the instrument in more adventurous ways. In fact, O'Rourke is more inspired by the late musical deconstructionist John Cage than the guitar heroes of his generation. One thing Cage was known for was his "prepared" piano pieces, which called for objects such as rubber balls, woodscrews, and hatpins to be inserted between the piano's strings to alter the instrument's sound. If there's one guy who knows how to apply similar approaches to electric guitars, it's O'Rourke.

*

What is prepared guitar?

Instead of treating the guitar like it's a traditional musical instrument, you approach it simply as a piece of wood that has strings and a pickup attached to it. So instead of using your hands to play notes and chords, you're getting new sounds out of it by playing it with *implements.*

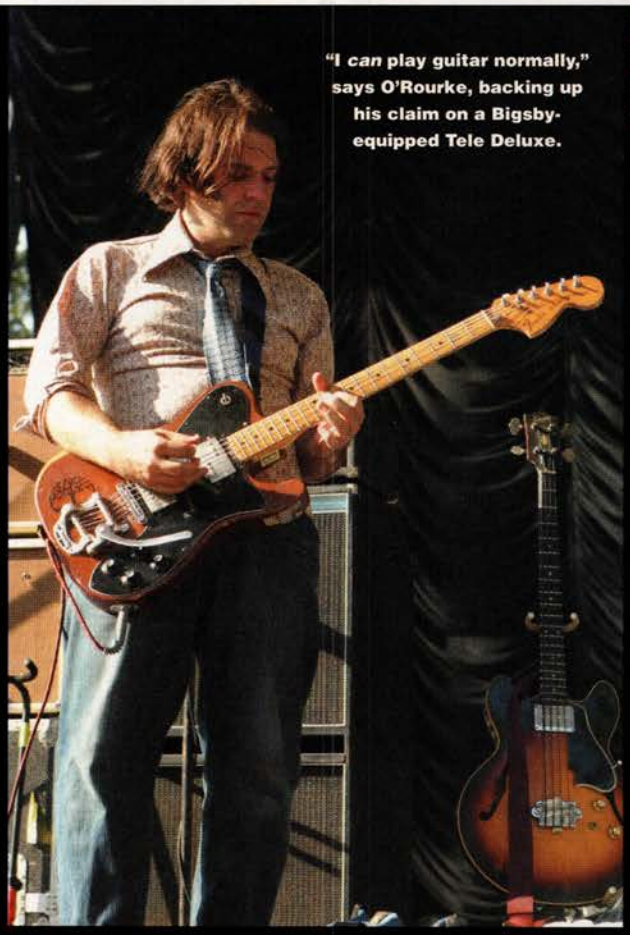
What are some of your favorite implements?

One interesting thing you can do is to hover a speaker above the strings and right over the pickup. Depending on how far you move the speaker from the pickup, it acts sort of like a resonator—even to the point of creating total feedback.

Another thing I do is mount a magnet directly onto the guitar's body. Then, I remove the coil from a speaker and place it directly on the magnet. If you pump sounds into the coil—even the guitar's own signal—the coil and magnet will drive the entire body of the guitar, and the guitar will feed back on itself through the resonance of its own wood.

How might you use that approach on an album?

When I was working with Wilco on "Poor Places" from *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*, we wanted to replace the tune's piano track with something more interesting. So I drove a speaker coil with the piano's signal and put it up to a magnet mounted on a guitar that had all six of its strings tuned to one note. Whenever a chord went by in the piano part that contained the note—or the harmonic—the guitar's strings were tuned to, it would ring out in sympathetic vibration.

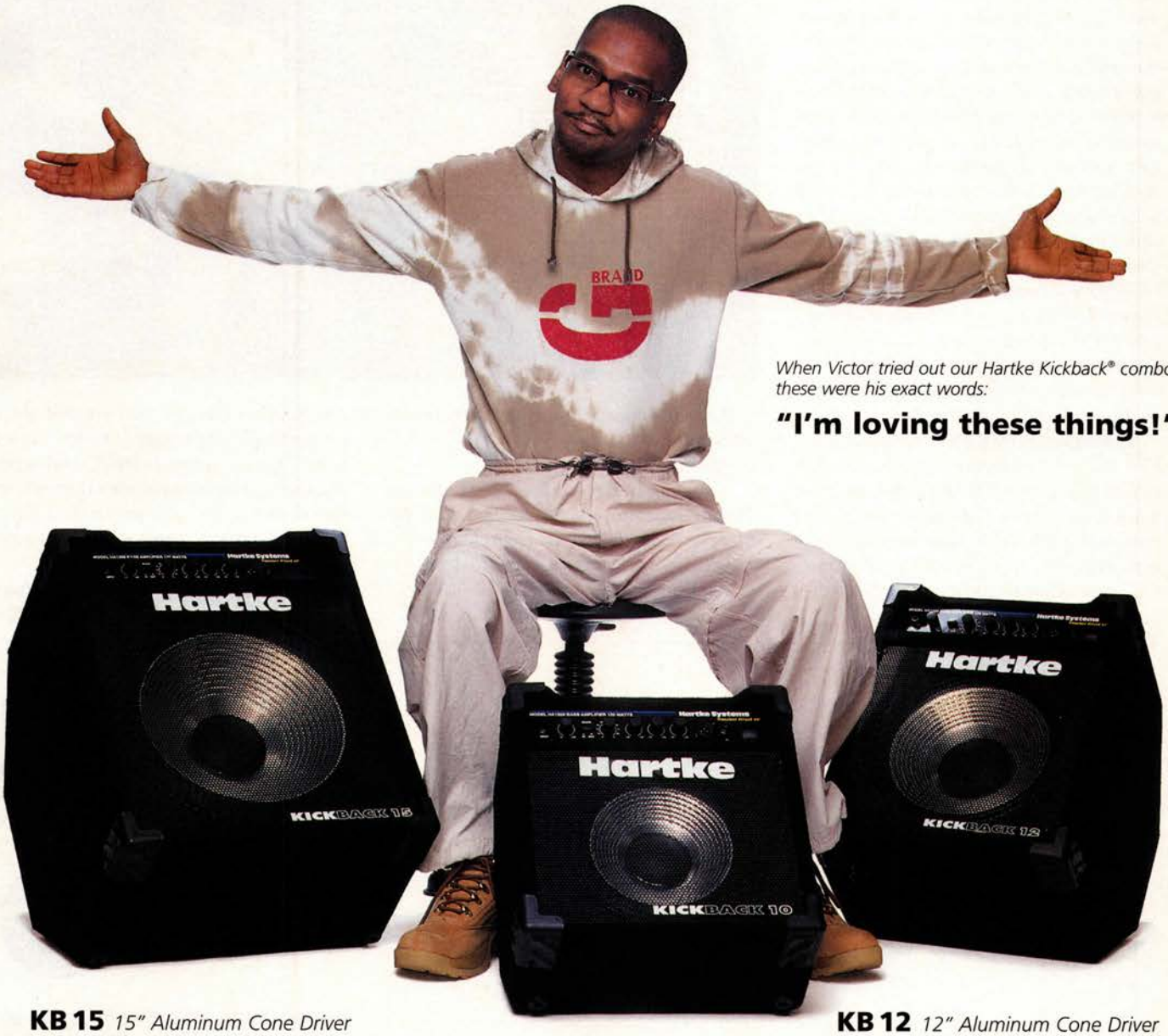


"I *can* play guitar normally," says O'Rourke, backing up his claim on a Bigsby-equipped Tele Deluxe.

RAYLAY SERGEY

It's like when you shout into a piano and cause certain pitches to sound. We did that for every note in the progression, and then we took out the piano track. So what you're left hearing is the same chord progression, but instead of piano, it's played by several tracks of resonating guitars. What's cool is that you can still kind of hear the piano in the guitar tracks because it was resonating through the guitar body the whole time. —JG

Meet Victor Bailey's latest collaborators.



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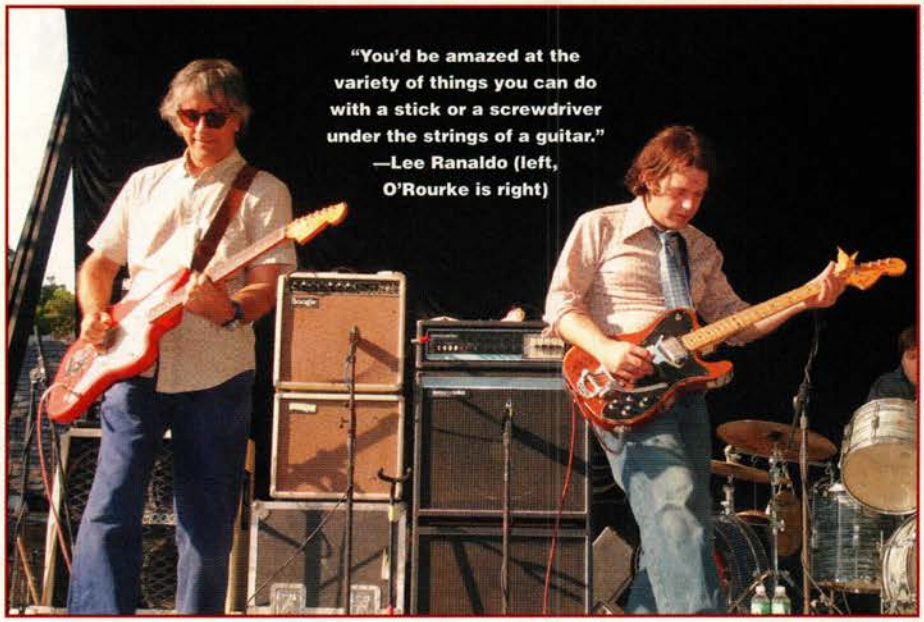
Ranaldo: Jazzmasters and Jaguars are still our favorite guitars in terms of body length, shape, and whammy bar, but we often modify them. We rip out most of the electronics, because, to our minds, all those little switches and doodads are overly complicated and prone to breaking down. We like our guitars to be as rigorous as possible, because we tend to throw them around and beat them up quite a bit. So we often hardwire the pickups directly to the output jack. I usually try to replace the pickups with humbuckers from Telecaster Deluxes. Once I do that, I call the guitars "Jazzblasters." I also have a couple of custom-built guitars that are modeled after Jazzmasters, but have odd little touches. There's one I used a lot on the new record that has a pickup installed *behind* the bridge to get further amplification of those little short strings on the other side.

O'Rourke: I mostly played a Gibson Firebird. But to get interesting sounds, you can't rely on an amp, a guitar, or a pedal—you just gotta *do* it. I'm one of those people who seems to be able to get noise out of anything. Even if I picked up a clarinet, I'd be doing multi-phonics before I could play a normal note—and multi-phonics are supposedly much more difficult!



"You'd be amazed at the variety of things you can do with a stick or a screwdriver under the strings of a guitar." —Lee Ranaldo (left, O'Rourke is right)

RAHAV SEGEV

Describe your rigs.

Ranaldo: In the studio, I use a vintage Fender Super Reverb, but live I run an old blackface Fender Bandmaster head into a Mesa/Boogie 4x12 cabinet. I prefer older Fender amps when I can get them, but I do like the new blackface reissues. After a period when it seemed like Fender had forgotten how to make a good amp, they're finally making great amps again. My pedals include a Hughes & Kettner distortion, an old Ibanez analog delay, a Line 6 DL4 delay modeler, and a Moogerfooger ring modulator.

O'Rourke: I keep things simple and stick to

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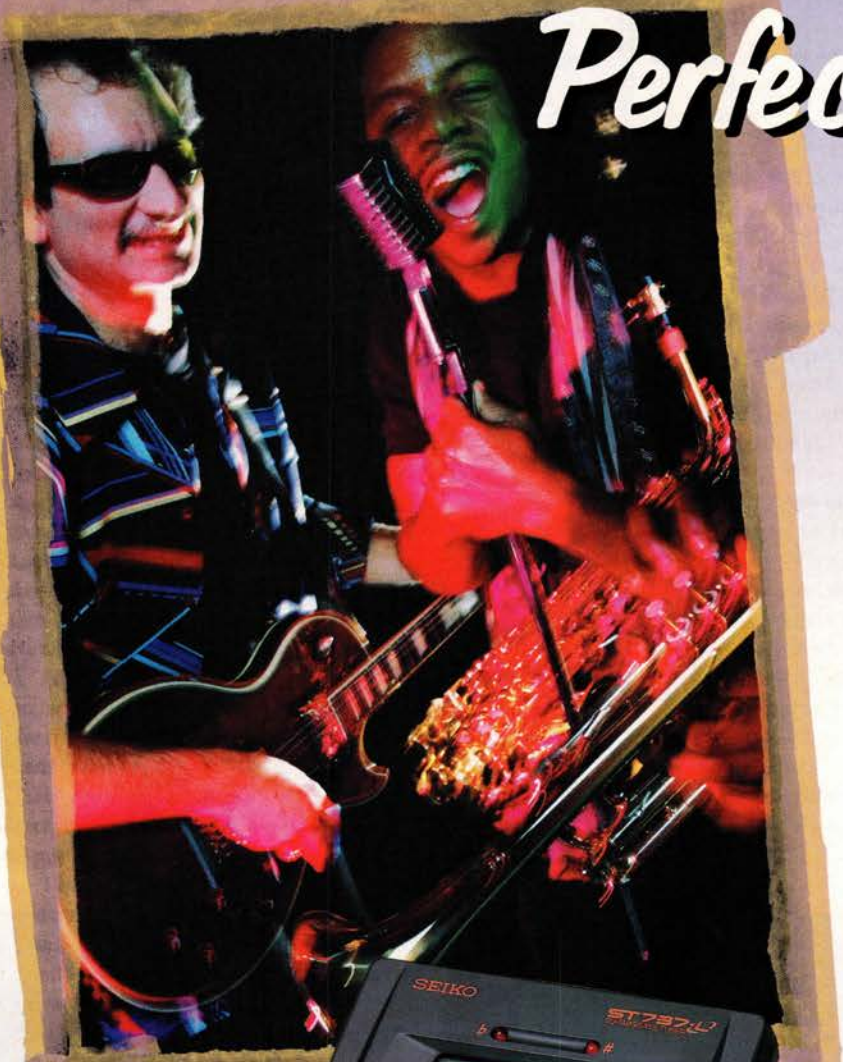

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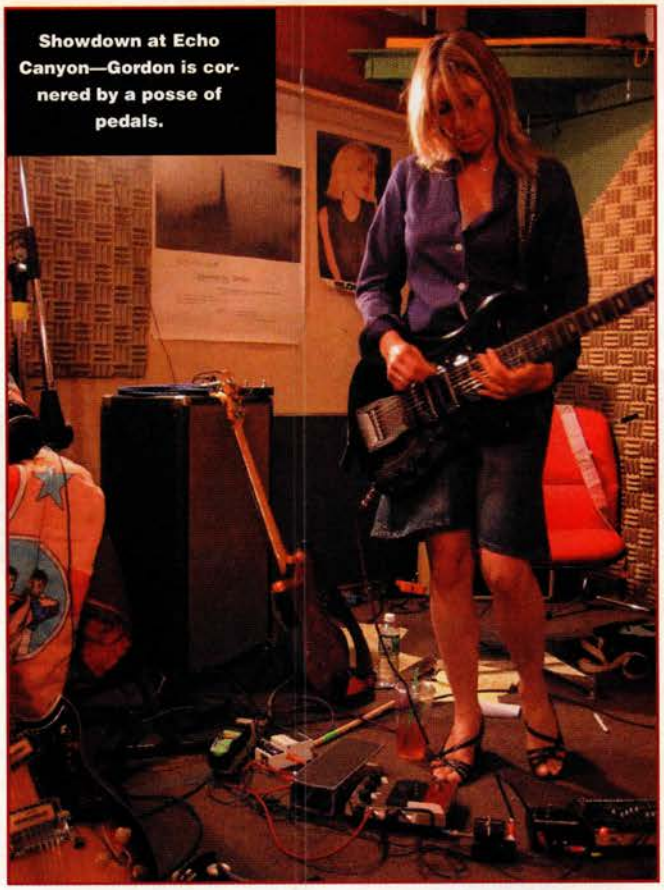
a Fender Twin Reverb. When it comes to stompboxes, however, one thing I like to do is rebuild them. For example, I once rewired a phase pedal so it made unpredictable sounds somewhat like a ring modulator. I don't always know what I'm doing or why it works, but I know what it does sonically.

Moore: For me, it's all about plugging a Dunlop Jimi Hendrix Octave Fuzz into a Sovtek Big Muff and a vintage Mu-Tron Vol-Wah pedal while my fist presses the strings against the pickups roughly. That's one of my favorite ways to play, and I do it on just about every song. For amps, I like nothing more than playing a Jazzmaster through a Peavey Road Master tube head driving a Marshall 4x12. I've been using Road Masters for years, and I like the way they sound when the tubes are perfectly matched and firing in a nice, juicy way.

Speaking of Road Masters, Thurston, you're known for killing *one while tracking "Scooter & Jinx" on 1990's* Goo.

Moore: Yeah, those heads are fan-cooled, and the fan is on the top of the amp's cabinet, blowing downward. So I covered the fan with my guitar and the amp started suffocating. I just maxed it out and then toggled my pickup selector. It's a great sound, but I try to let up on it so the amp doesn't *completely* blow, like it did on "Scooter & Jinx."

O'Rourke: You don't always need processors or pedals to create interesting effects in the studio. For example, in the middle section of "Karen Revisited" from the new album, there were two or three guitar feedback tracks that were really close in pitch, so I pumped them loudly through a P.A. system and recorded *that* with room mics. The result was natural ring modulation, which occurs



Showdown at Echo Canyon—Gordon is cornered by a posse of pedals.

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whenever you put frequencies together that are very close in pitch.

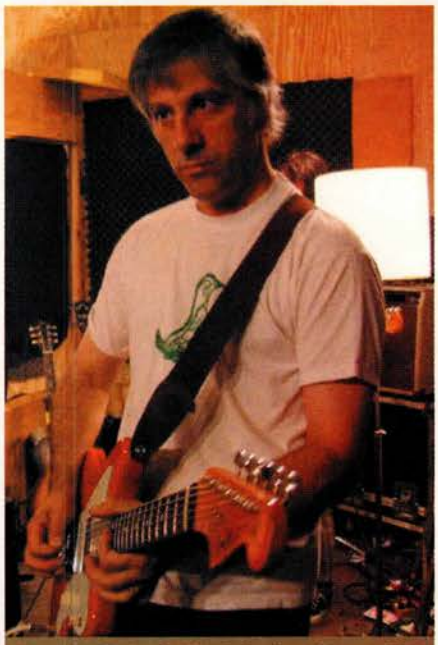
That song is over 11 minutes in length. In the vinyl age, it would almost be an album side.

Moore: Eleven minutes is really not that long—at least not for *us*. In a sense, it's like cuts from great albums by Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and the Grateful Dead, because at 11 minutes, the composition is really just getting *started*. The head is sort of a structured pop thing, and then it goes into this long improvisational section. We combined the studio version with a live version recorded at a benefit for 9/11 victims at the Bowery Ballroom in Manhattan.

Those long "noise" sections sound utterly chaotic, yet elaborately composed. How do you orchestrate them?

Ranaldo: We build them like sculptures—from the ground up. Everybody hacks away at it until it's something. We'll often just sit around in a room with a tape recorder as a sketching tool and start generating sounds. Ideas gradually expand and develop until we have a structure and a songscape.

Moore: It's not noise improvisation, though it may have originated as such when we first created it. Each of us is playing a distinct musical part that intertwines with the others.



Web sight—Sonic Youth invites the world to watch Ranaldo and the band's live rehearsals at sonicyouth.com.

O'Rourke: The challenge is keeping it all together, and then, when it falls apart, making sure it's a *good* falling apart.

Early reviews of Murray Street *have asserted that it features guitars that are "more focused" than on other Sonic Youth records.*

Ranaldo: I wouldn't say that's true at all. The guitars are focused on *all* of our records. They're focused on what we're trying to achieve, which from day one has been putting together interesting song structures. Maybe the new album has more song-oriented stuff that happens to be more palatable and familiar to their ears.

O'Rourke: It's kind of ironic when a reviewer thinks that one or two listens of a record can possibly equal the same amount of thought that was put into it by the people who spent a year recording it. Some albums don't have everything shouting at you on the surface, and they require several listens to see how the parts work together.

How are Murray Street *and 2000's* NYC Ghosts and Flowers *part of a trilogy?*

Moore: Like any band that has a decade or more of history, there are a lot of times when our identity is dictated by the perceptions of critics, writers, and listeners. It was music writer Byron Coley who first made the claim that Sonic Youth was doing a trilogy about the history and culture of lower Manhattan, and that *Murray Street* was the second installment. Though we had never thought about it like that, we realized he was really onto something. I found Coley's comment so completely valid I said, "Boy, that's a great idea—I'm glad *I* thought of it." [*Laughs.*]

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BY DARRIN FOX

ACOUSTIC ELECTRIC WARRIOR

"I go against the grain," says fusion pioneer Al Di Meola. "In the mid-'80s, I made *Cielo el Terra*, which was a very esoteric, avant-garde, classical-inspired record. Although it wasn't quite what the record company—or my fans—expected at the time, it was an album I felt I had to make. The

Al Di Meola Strikes Out Against Bland Guitar

PHOTOS BY: PATRICK FARRELL

"You need to advance creatively," says Di Meola. "If you don't, all that's left is Vegas."

same thing happened in 1980, when I did the acoustic trio record, *Friday Night in San Francisco* with John McLaughlin and Paco de Lucia. My electric records *Elegant Gypsy* and *Casino* were selling in the millions, and, needless to say, the record company wanted me to continue in that vain. But I have to do what feels good to me."

Embracing his inclination to shake things up, Di Meola views his new release, *Flesh on Flesh* [Telarc], as a shot across the bow of contemporary instrumental guitar—a genre he sees as stale and lacking fire. "These days," he says, "many of my contemporaries are so concerned about getting on the radio, that it has taken the edge away from their music."

Besides the compositional and arrangement elements, are there any other factors that you believe make Flesh on Flesh *an "edgy" album?*

This record wasn't recorded in the fashion most of my contemporaries record—which is one instrument at a time. That approach totally misses the vibe and energy you get from playing in a room with a band. We tracked *Flesh On Flesh* mostly live, and we really kicked some butt. We captured that certain magic you can only get when everyone is playing together in one space and all the sounds blend together and bleed into the microphones. It's a powerful, bigger, and more cohesive and interesting energy. Sadly, it seems unusual for guys to play together in a studio these days—at least judging by the records I'm hearing.

How do you follow your muse, and not succumb to overly commercial considerations when writing?

When I start to write, I just let it all come out. I don't edit my ideas, and I don't worry about a composition being too long. I want to see what happens. A lot of times, I'll end up with things that are only interesting to me. On my first three records, for example, I wasn't thinking about appealing to a wide audience at all. I was just trying to make the most interesting guitar music I could make. Now my instincts have become better honed, and my instincts are the most important things for me to follow.

It's impressive that you've had a huge impact on the players in your scene, but nobody has ever sounded like you.

Stanley Clarke once told me, "When I listen

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"I get very inspired by what other people play." — Leni Stern, Aug. '98, *GP*

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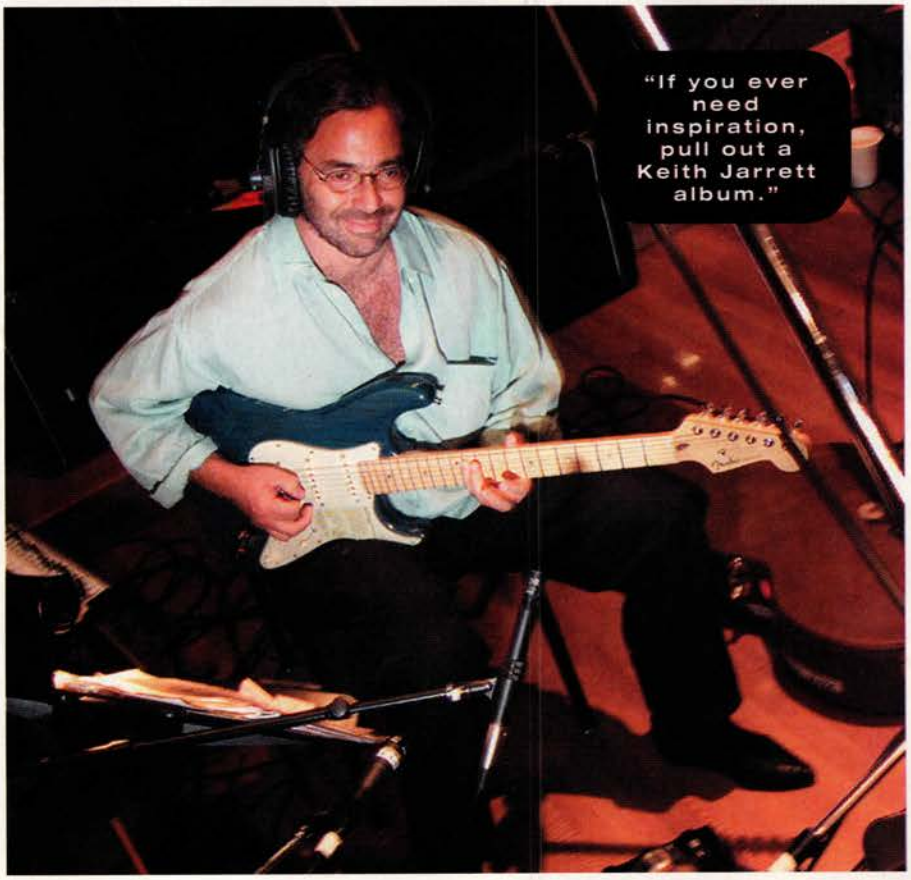
to you, I can't really hear what guitarists you listened to." That really struck me, because I *do* have my influences. I'm a huge Beatles fan, but you don't really pick them out in my music—or Hendrix or Jim Hall, either. I use those influences in different ways, although they all point to how I favor the importance of melody in my music. A lot of critics *still* don't notice the melodic nature of my compositions. They go for the same darlings every year. I guess I like being the black sheep.

There are some style changes on the new record. I have to say that hearing your clean and clucky Strat tone on "Señor Mouse" was unsettling, given that your searing, super-thick humbucker tones have become as much a trademark as your muted speed-picking.

I love playing a Strat. It makes me play different, but that's the whole intent.

Of course, your Les Paul is still very much in evidence.

I did use my old '58 Les Paul, but the majority of electric tones you hear on the record are, oddly enough, an acoustic through a cool Les Paul/Marshall sound on my Roland VG-88. I put GK-2A pickups on my Ovation acoustic and Conde-Hermanos nylon string, and I used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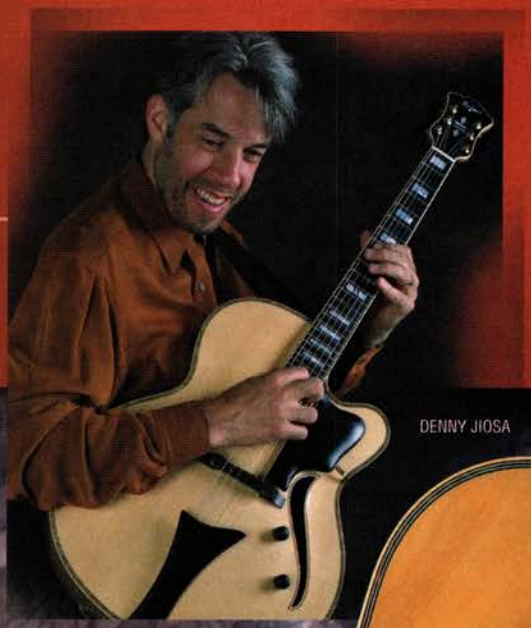

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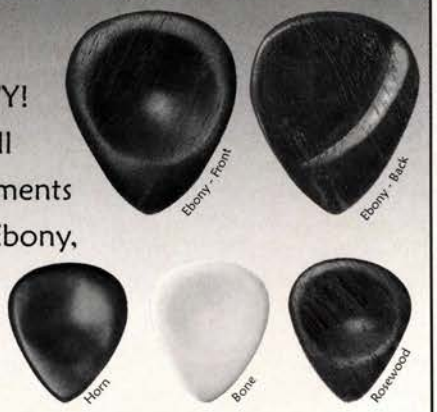

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the VG-88's foot pedal to blend in how much electric tone I wanted. I could double my lines without ever having to switch guitars. To me, the Les Paul/Marshall preset in my VG-88 sounds better than the real deal, and the acoustic/VG-88 setup allows me to get the best of the electric and acoustic worlds.

Do you manage to get in all the practice time you need to maintain your chops?

I don't really need to practice hard on keeping my chops up anymore. However, I do continually practice certain lines in [late Argentinean Tango master] Astor Piazzolla's music that are very difficult.

Unfortunately, when you tour as much as I do, you end up spending more time dealing with the organizational aspect of playing. I don't like it, but if I don't deal with it, things will get screwed up. I *love* to practice, and I wish I could go back to when I was a kid and had a lot less to deal with.

Because I'm a composer, my practice sessions tend to be writing opportunities, as well. If I stumble on to something good, I'll turn it into a tune. On the other hand, I sometimes come up with tunes that are so demanding it takes practice to play them right. And that's not counting the time I put in trying different ways of playing a song and looking for interesting chord inversions. This is one instance where being on the road *is* good, because I find myself in hotels with a lot of time to kill.

Speaking of Piazzolla, you've covered so many of his songs it's almost like you're addicted to his music.

Piazzolla's music is special on every level. It's full of all the emotions that one person could ever endure. And for the guitarist, there are harmonic intricacies, cool arppegiated lines, and amazing

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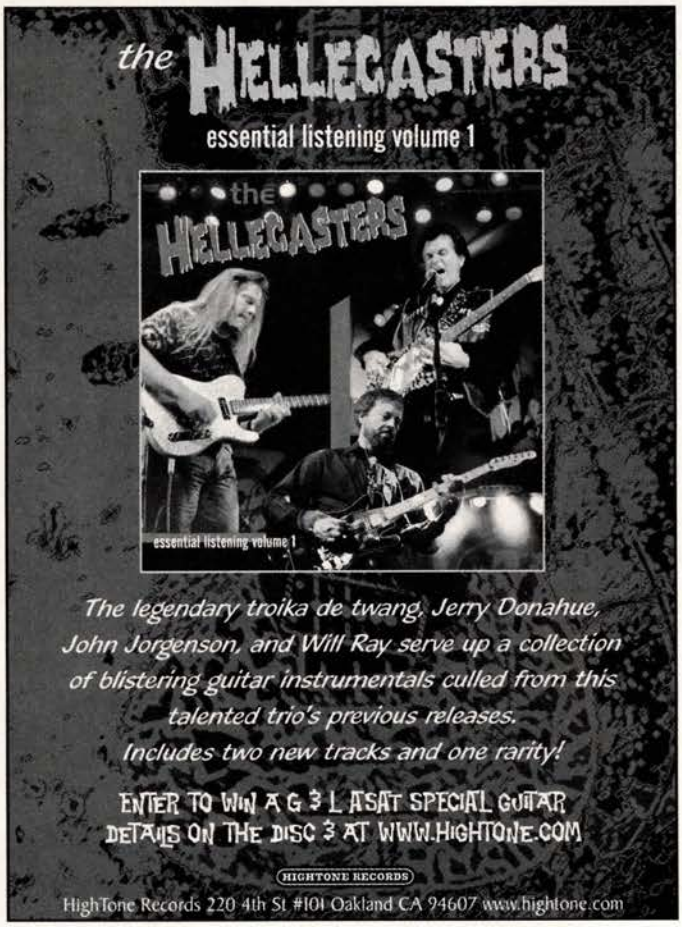


technical challenges in his music. He made all that stuff work together in the most incredible way I've ever heard.

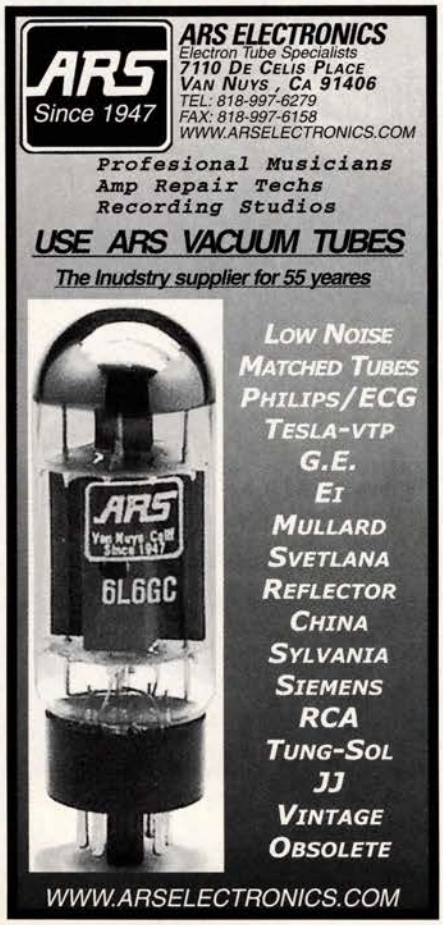
To give his music my own stamp, I take the rhythmic structure and syncopate it more—which takes the feel out of it's square classical element—and put the guitar more in the forefront.

It has been nearly three decades since you first turned heads as the fire-breathing shredder in Chick Corea's Return to Forever, but you still have to deal with the baggage of being a guitarist who boldly displays his chops.

That has become an absolute *joke*. I find that most of the people who accuse me of being an overly-technical guitarist haven't heard anything past my third record—and I've released a vast amount of material since then. The people who have followed me over the years know that there's a lot more depth to my music than just the technical element.

You're very frank about your disappointment over the current state of guitar playing—do you feel the guitar is losing its relevance and vitality?

As long as the *music* is interesting, the guitar will endure. Fusion was unbelievably interesting when it came out. It was a new world. We haven't had that kind of explosion in the guitar world in a long time. What is cool today is not what I would call cool. I feel there isn't any musically interesting, technically challenging stuff coming from the younger generation. There's too much emphasis on no-talent guys like Eminem, and the music world has embraced junk music. The guys who are really doing something—guys like Ralph Towner—are nowhere to be heard on the radio, and that's a damn shame.



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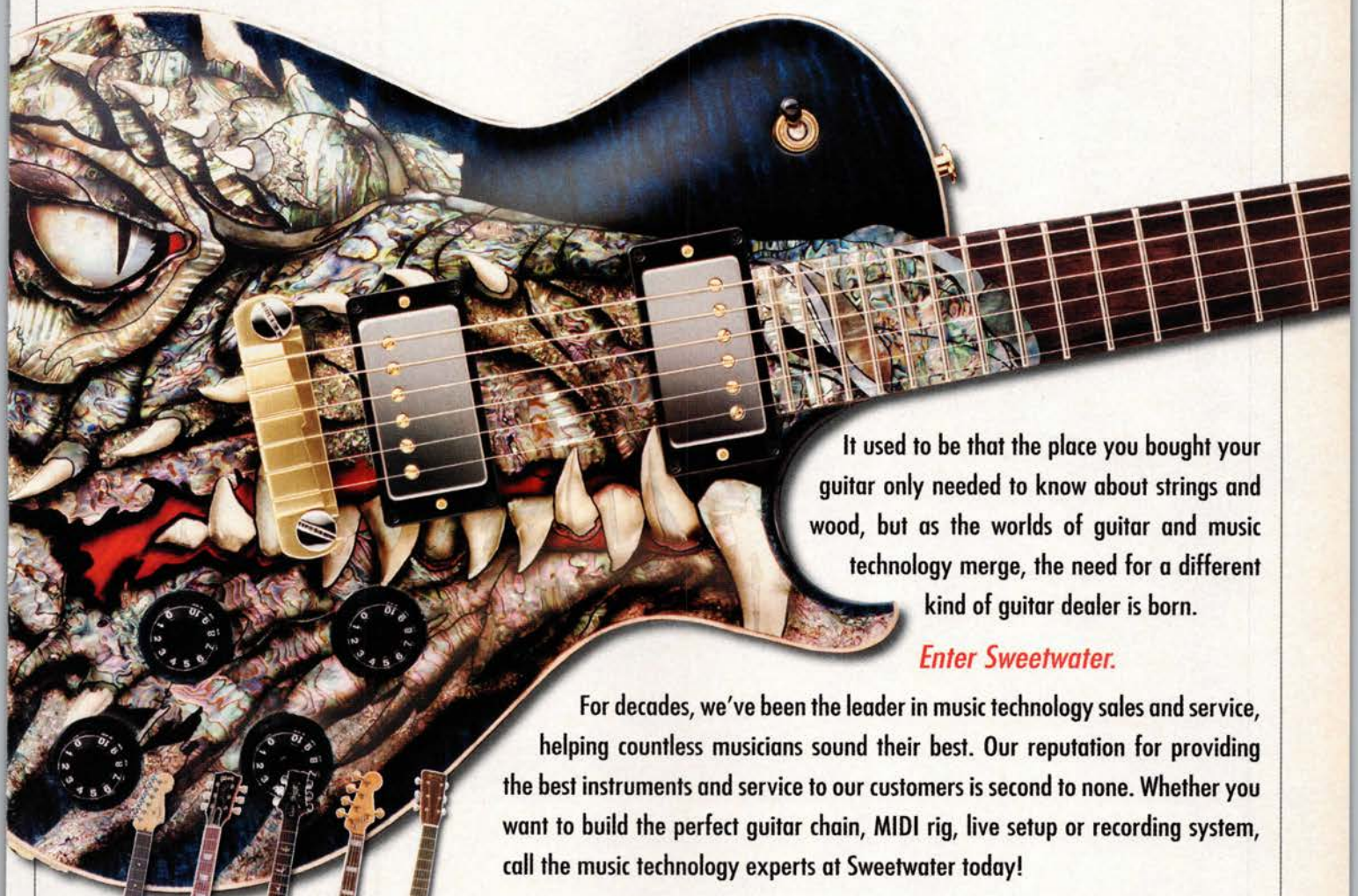

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BOSS MAN

> BY ART THOMPSON

springsteen's ace sideman steven van zandt details the making of *The Rising*

With his trademark bandana and high-energy stage persona, Steven Van Zandt has forged an identity that's as integral to the Bruce Springsteen experience as the Boss' modded Esquire. But Van Zandt's celebrated role as guitarist, producer, and main harmony behind Springsteen doesn't overshadow the notoriety

PHOTOGRAPH BY KEN SETTLE

van zandt with his Fender '57 reissue strat. As with most of his other electrics, it's strung with D'Addario .009-.042 nickel-wound sets.

BOSS MAN >

he has achieved though his solo projects, social efforts, and recent acting career.

"I'm about ten different people," admits Van Zandt. "There's the guitar player, the songwriter, the producer, the DJ, and the actor. All those guys are sort of in here somewhere. I just try to pull out the right one at the appropriate time."

Most guitarists would be plenty satisfied to *just* be a rock star, but Van Zandt is far too restless to sit on his 6-string accomplishments. Along with playing the role of hit man Silvio Dante on the *Sopranos*, Van Zandt is currently hosting his own national radio show—*Little Steven's Underground Garage*—which not only spotlights all the '60s groups you *don't* hear on the oldies stations, but also a growing number of new bands who otherwise wouldn't get such media attention. Most recently, Van Zandt has strapped on a guitar to play on Springsteen's evocative new release, *The Rising* [Columbia], and he's back on the road with the E Street Band for the Boss' current tour.

•••••••

Is it still a thrill to be involved in a new Springsteen project?

I always forget what an amazing experience it is to be playing in this band, and Bruce's songs just keep getting better with age. I always thought they were ahead of their time, but that's something you can't fully appreciate until you're 25 years down the road. And the audiences—man, we have some of the most loyal and enthusiastic fans in the history of rock and roll! In Europe, easily half our audience is *under* 25. I'm seeing all these kids who weren't even born the last time we played there, and they know every word to even obscure songs like "Youngstown."

Compared to how forcefully you played on your last solo record, Born Again Savage, *did you have to recalibrate to work on such a reflective album as* The Rising?

Oh yeah. Especially compared to *Born Again Savage*, which was the first pure rock record I ever did as a solo artist. I've never really been a lead player in the E Street Band, it's strictly a rhythm guitar gig, so that album gave me a chance to play like my guitar heroes—Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page, Eric Clapton, and Jimi Hendrix.

So how would you describe your guitar approach on The Rising?

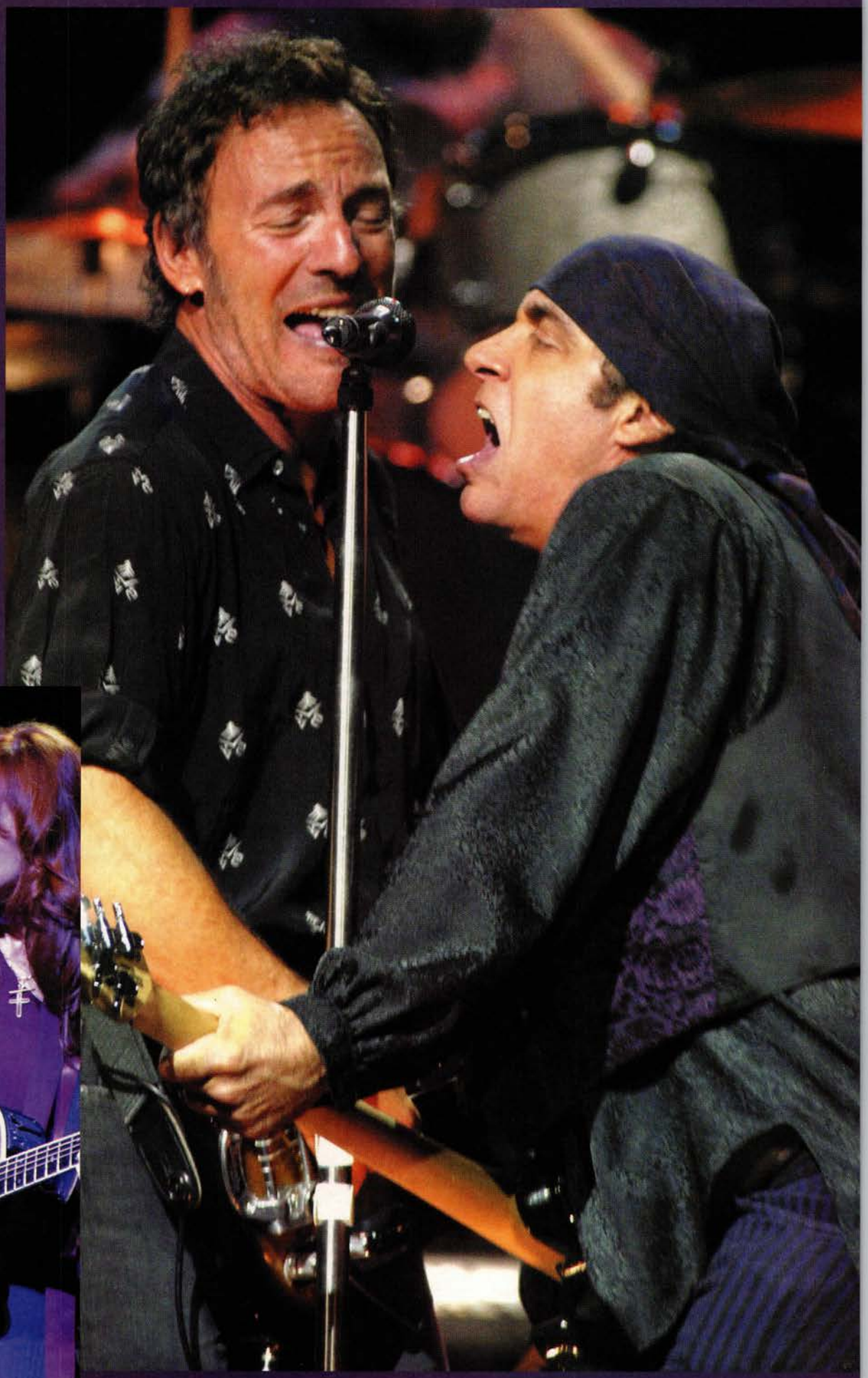
Flexible. I just did whatever was necessary for the song. Having a flexible approach is helpful on an album like this, because, though the songs are very different from each other, they're very coherent lyrically. I just need a riff here and there to keep me happy, and I'm glad I got that one in the last verse of "Countin' on a Miracle."

Your use of a flatpick and two fingerpicks is somewhat unusual for a rock player. How did you arrive at that technique?

I learned it from a guy named John Hall, who I saw playing in Greenwich Village when I was a kid. John, who later was in the band Orleans, was the greatest guitarist I had ever seen until I discovered Jeff Beck.

>

new york city, august 12th—van zandt slings a rickenbacker tom petty model 12-string while springsteen hammers down on a telecaster with joe barden pickups. at far right, patti scialfa strums a takamine acoustic



"I established my identity long ago by being the main voice singing behind Bruce."

PHOTOS: RAHAV SEGEV

Rising Forces

Van Zandt tracked his parts on The Rising *using a variety of guitars, amps, and effects. Here's a song-by-song breakdown of what he used. —AT*

"Countin' on a Miracle"

Gibson ES-330 through a 50-watt Marshall with a 4x12 cabinet.

Gibson ES-330 through a Fender Super Reverb with an Ibanez Tube Screamer.

Rickenbacker 12-string through a Line 6 Pod with an Electro-Harmonix Holy Grail reverb.

"You're Missing"

Martin D35 12-string.

"Waiting on a Sunny Day"

Gibson A Style mandolin with D strings tuned down to C.

"Worlds Apart"

Fender '64 Strat through a Vox AC30 with a Way Huge Green Rhino overdrive and an Ibanez Tube Screamer.

"Empty Sky"

Early '60s Kent 6-string through a Leslie rotary speaker.

"Further on up the Road"

Fender '64 Strat through a Fender Hot Rod Deville.

"Into the Fire"

Gibson A Style mandolin.

"Lonesome Day"

Gibson A Style mandolin.

Fender '64 Strat through a Fender Hot Rod Deville.

"Mary's Place"

Gibson ES-330 through a Fender Hot Rod Deville with an Echoplex.

Gibson Les Paul gold-top through a Leslie.

Gibson A Style mandolin.

"My City of Ruins"

Gibson Les Paul Goldtop through a Leslie.

"The Fuse"

Bigsby-equipped Fender Telecaster through an Echoplex and a 40-watt Marshall.

For the tremolo hits: a 6-string Rickebacker through an Ampeg Reverberocket.

"The Rising"

Gibson ES-330 tuned up a half-step through a Fender Hot Rod Deville.

Mellotron through an Echoplex, a Tube Screamer, and a 50-watt Marshall driving a 4x12 cabinet.

"Nothing Man"

Rickenbacker 6-string tuned down a half-step through an Ampeg Reverberocket.

BOSS MAN >

What's the advantage of that picking style?

It's really useful for R&B licks. It comes in handy when I play those two-note Steve Cropper or Pop Staples things because it really makes the notes stand out. I've been playing with fingerpicks on my middle and fourth fingers since I was 15, so I don't even think about it now.

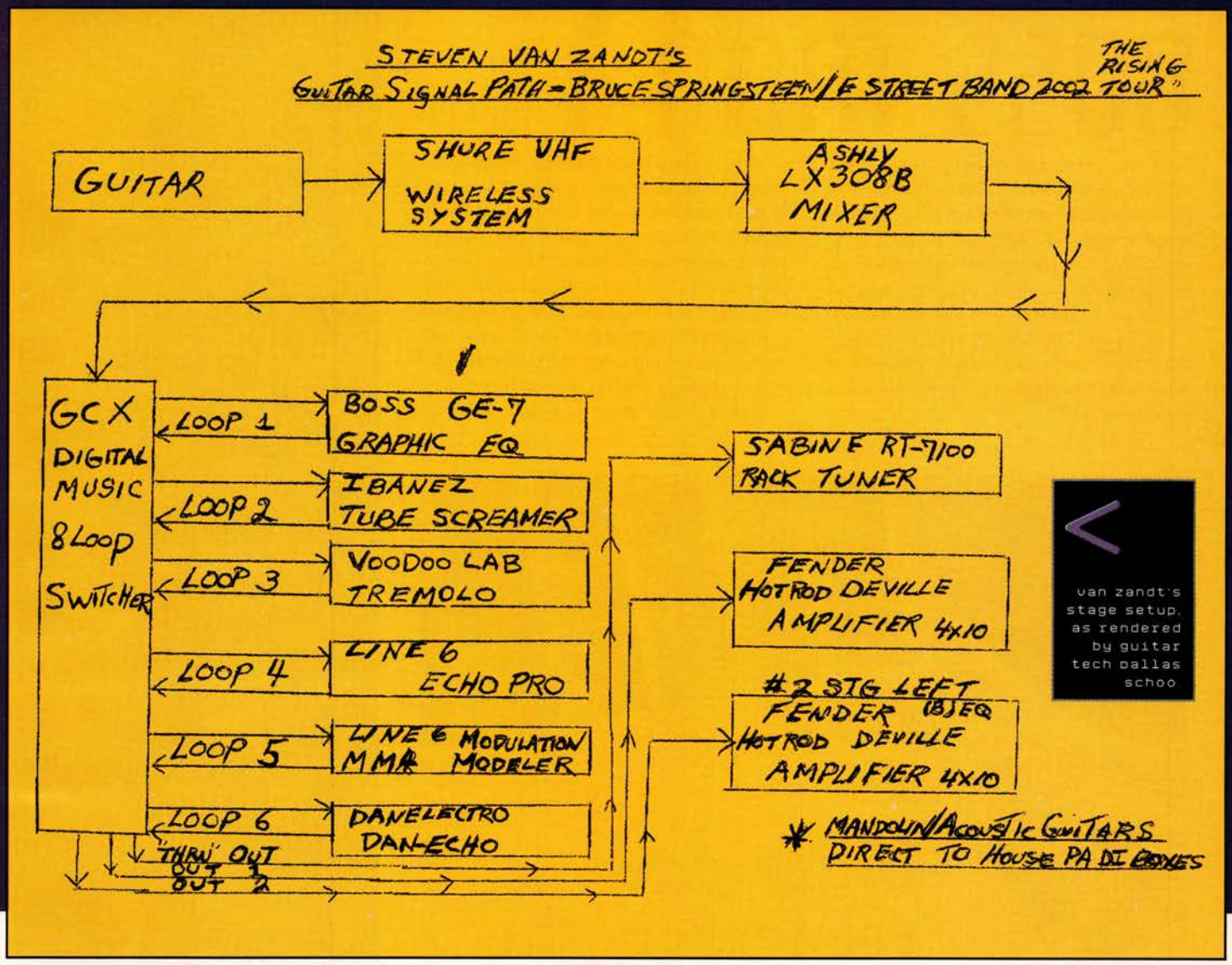
Is it difficult to find your voice in a band with three guitarists?

Yeah, but I think I established my identity long ago by being the main voice singing behind Bruce. My need to feel like I was contributing something substantial to the band was fulfilled by my arranging of *Darkness on the Edge of Town* and production involvement on *The River* and *Born in the USA*. Now that we have three guitarists, it's simply a matter of finding various ways to create parts that complement Bruce's music.

Producer Brendan O'Brien is noted for his work with Pearl Jam, Soundgarden, Korn, and Stone Temple Pilots. Was he a good choice for the E Street Band?

I have very strong opinions about producing, but I went in there with an open mind hoping Brendan would be great, and he turned out to be better than I could have imagined. He's a younger guy, but he has a very good sense of rock history. He's also into analog gear—a prerequisite as far as I'm concerned—and he's obviously a band guy. He was very open to us contributing whatever ideas we had, and yet he was able to get this record done faster than

PHOTO: STEVE JENNINGS



van zandt's stage setup, as rendered by guitar tech dallas schoo

anything we've ever made. If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I wouldn't have believed he could work so well in this situation.

Are Bruce's songs completely finished when you get in the studio, or do you still have some input on the arrangements?

I used to be very much involved in the arranging, but not so much now. The way it worked this time was that Bruce would write a bunch of songs and then we'd record. Then we'd take a break and he'd write another bunch, and we'd record those. After a year and half, he was able to put together an album's worth of songs that said what he wanted to say. It's always important for Bruce to feel like he has made a coherent and cohesive piece of work.

Did you and [co-guitarist] Nils Lofgren discuss what parts you're going to play on the new album, or did you work independently?

It was a bit of both. When we were in the studio at the same time, obviously we worked out what we were going to do. But if Nils had worked on a song before I did, then I worked off of his parts. If he played an acoustic on something, I'd play an electric. If he played a clean part, I'd do a really dirty part.

What guitars did you use on the album?

I used quite a few [see sidebar, "Rising Forces"], although I didn't bring any of *mine* to the sessions. I mostly played Bruce's and Brendan's guitars, which included various Teles, Strats, Les Pauls, Rickenbacker 12-strings, Gretsches, and other things.

Is the Strat still your main choice live?

Up until now I've been using a Stratocaster exclusively with Bruce, but on this tour I've mostly been playing a Gibson Firebird—one of the newer models with humbuckers. The humbucking thing is generally not a good idea for this type of band, because it sounds too big. But by running my amp really clean, I'm finding that the Firebird gives me a little more sustain without sounding too thick or distorted. It almost sounds like an acoustic-electric guitar.

Has modern technology affected the way you record?

Not really. I just don't find anything about the new stuff that's better than what you get from analog gear. I'm willing to try new stuff, but I always come back to analog. I think *Born Again Savage* is just about the fattest sounding CD you could possibly imagine, and it was recorded and mixed completely on analog equipment.

Do you track your guitar parts with effects?

I played through effects quite a lot on this album. I go back and forth on how I get my distortion tones, though. Sometimes I'll get it straight from the amp, sometimes I'll use a fuzz. I like the idea of trying various combinations of guitars, amps, and effects until you find something that fits.

Do you use effects live?

I do, but my guitar tech, Dallas Schoo, switches them on and off for me. I don't want to be stumbling around in the dark looking

for a pedal when I'm trying to focus on performing. Besides, it's not like I need a bunch of different sounds for every song. When it comes to guitar tones in big arenas, it's basically clean and dirty, or dirty and dirtier [*laughs*]. When you play in those places, you're changing guitars and pedals mostly for your own amusement.

In the late '70s and early '80s, when the E Street Band was hitting its stride, did you take much note of the punk rock movement going on simultaneously?

I did. In fact, it was probably the last time I really felt that a new musical genre had anything interesting to offer. I didn't think it was something I needed to absorb, but despite what the punks were saying at the time, I found the music to be very traditional in terms of structure. That's why it holds up so well—the Sex Pistols' *Never Mind the Bollocks* was one of the greatest albums ever made and the Ramones get a ton of play on my radio show.

What about your own underground project, the Lost Boys?

That was something I did briefly in the early '90s. My plan was to do three solo rock records, and the Lost Boys was going to be a sort of mid-60s-style, rock-and-roll thing. I went looking for a singer and never found one, so the project ended up as demos with me doing the singing. One of those songs made it on the *Sopranos* soundtrack.

Now that your career involves more than just playing music, has your attitude toward performing changed at all?

Not really. As when I was 15, I go onstage fully intending to do the best show you've ever seen. Whether we get there or not doesn't matter,

"When we started, making records was a distant dream. So we had to rely 100 percent on playing live to make a living, and we got very, very good at it."

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but that's the attitude I have.

What do you think has contributed most to establishing the sort of audience bond that the E Street Band enjoys?

I think it's because we were a very good live band before we were ever really in the music business. Making records was sort of a distant dream that we often thought we'd never reach. We had to rely 100 percent on playing live to make a living, and we got very, very good at it. There are very few bands of our stature who only have live hits, but how would you know that "Thunder Road" *wasn't* a hit when the audience knows every word of it?

Is it tougher now for bands to use live shows as a means to establish themselves?

It's almost impossible because the infrastructure isn't there to support it. You can't get the local and regional airplay that we got, and it's just too expensive now to go back to a city three or four times a year.

You've managed to help some bands receive national attention via your radio show. Is that something you'd like to expand upon?

Yes. For the first time in my life, I'd really like to have a record label. There are a lot of bands I would like to sign who are under the radar right now. I'd like to turn my radio show into a TV show, and I'd like to establish a touring situation for garage bands through the Hard Rock Cafe—which is the title sponsor of my show. With 40 Hard Rock Cafes around the world, you

"The punk movement was the last time I really felt a new musical genre had anything interesting to offer. The Sex Pistols' *Never Mind the Bollocks* was one of the greatest albums ever made."

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could send bands out on a real tour. I wish I had more time to spend on this stuff, but we'll see.

Of all your achievements, which are the most significant for you?

Artistically speaking, I think the *Born Again Savage* record is the thing I'm most proud of. By the time I got to a recording studio in '74 or '75, I felt that all the great rock stuff had already been done, and I wasn't that far wrong. So to finally make a straight-ahead rock record and have it retain my own identity is something I'm very proud of.

The *Sun City* thing [a 1985, Top-40 single performed by the Van Zandt-organized Artists United Against Apartheid] was also very satisfying because it was so politically successful. It was a rare, clear-cut victory over apartheid, and that sort of thing doesn't happen very often in liberation politics.

I guess I'm proud of just about everything I've done, really. And now that I'm not writing songs or making records, being a DJ gives me an avenue of expression while allowing me to pay tribute to a lot bands that meant everything to me as a kid. I don't work just to stay busy or make money. So when I do something, I'm really passionate about it.

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By Andy Ellis

Perpetual Motion

Bryan Sutton Spills the Secrets of Fast, Fluid Flatpicking

It's three o'clock on a Thursday afternoon at Nashville's Ryman Auditorium, home of the Grand Ole Opry. While techs prepare the stage for tonight's show—the last in a series of summer bluegrass performances—several musicians chat quietly in the wings as they unpack their instruments. In a few hours, more than 1,300 people will slide onto the wooden church pews to enjoy the high, lonesome sounds of IIIrd Tyme Out and the legendary Hot Rize. But for now, the historic hall is empty, its silence broken only by the sporadic sounds of a fiddle, banjo, or mandolin being coaxed into concert pitch.

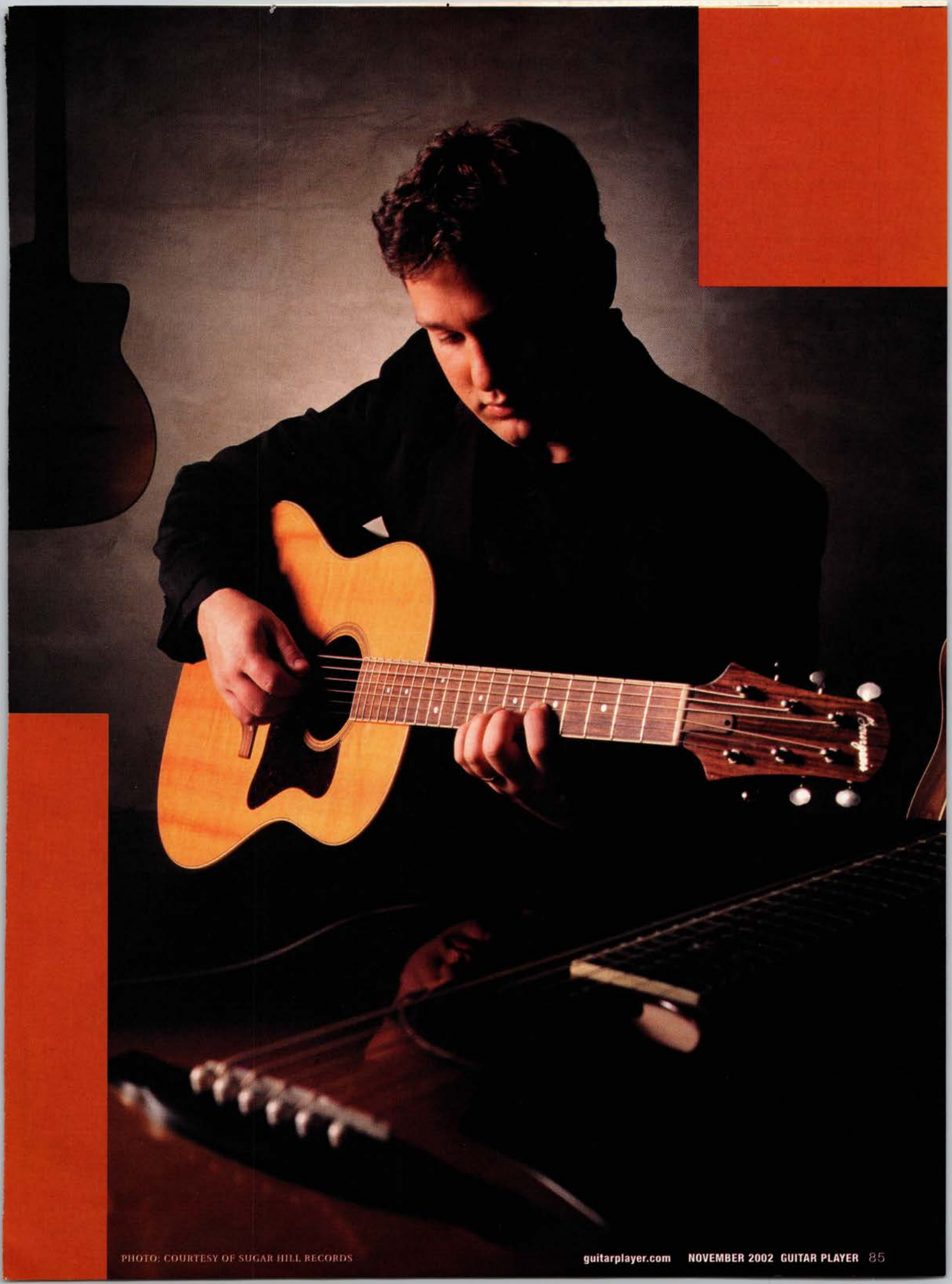


PHOTO: COURTESY OF SUGAR HILL RECORDS

Perpetual Motion

In a backstage dressing room, Bryan Sutton is running lightning-fast licks on his Bourgeois flat-top. Bluegrass connoisseurs consider Sutton the hottest flatpicker on the contemporary scene, and the youngest member in a line of virtuosos that reaches back to Doc Watson by way of Mark O'Connor, Tony Rice, Dan Crary, and Jack Lawrence. Tonight, Sutton will add his rippling lines and ringing chords to Hot Rize. Last night, he backed James Taylor in a taped television special. Jerry Douglas, the Dixie Chicks, Dolly Parton, and Ricky Skaggs are among those who call Sutton when they need unadulterated flatpicking magic. When we asked him to share some flatpicking secrets with *GP* readers, he was quick to offer insights into both the physical *and* mental aspects of this ear-grabbing genre.

Two-Hand Tango

"Many guitarists don't realize how essential hammer-ons and pull-offs are to flatpicking," says Sutton. "When you see mandolinists picking in the Bill Monroe style, there's a whirlwind of right-hand activity, and most people assume that's also true of guitar. But I approach flatpicking as a dual-hand technique in which hammer-ons and pull-offs are as important as picked notes. The trick is to make hammers and pulls sound robust.

"When I do a pull-off, for example, instead of simply lifting my finger off a vibrating string, I yank my fingertip from the note with enough force that I land against the next higher string. It's like a rest stroke in classical guitar, except the technique is applied to the fretting, rather than the picking hand. You're actually *plucking* a new note over the fretboard. I always pull down toward my feet, although I've seen other players flick their fingertips upward. I take a similar tack with hammer-ons: The goal is to tap one note at the same volume as you pick another. In a line like this [plays **Ex. 1**], I try to make each note equally loud, whether I'm picking, hammering, or pulling it."

When you try this phrase, notice how you pick only 19—just over half—of the 33 tones. The other 14 are generated with hammers and pulls. Play this four-bar phrase slowly, repeating it until each note comes out clearly and at equal volume. At first, you may need to ease up a bit on your picking hand. As your fretting hand gains strength—and your hammers and pulls get louder—you can dig in more vigorously with your flatpick.

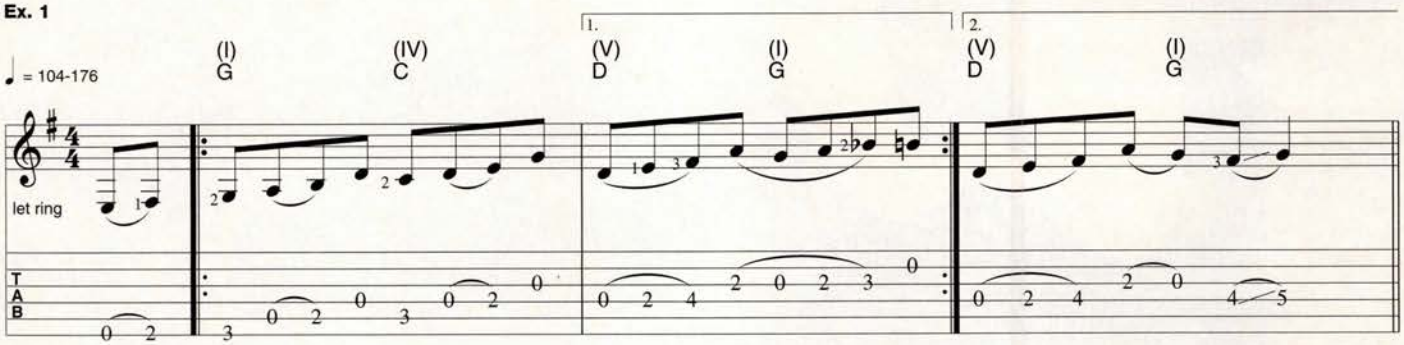
Note: Bluegrass and fiddle tunes are traditionally notated using eighth-notes, as we've done throughout this lesson. To keep these examples playable, we've written them at brisk but sane tempos. However, Sutton can rip through lines like this at nearly twice the speed. When you're able to *cleanly* play these phrases at their maximum indicated tempos, then you're ready to borrow a trick from hot string bands and play in fast cut time. To do this, simply halve the tempo and let the metronome clicks mark beats one and three. From here, you can gradually raise the tempo to stratospheric heights.

Added Value

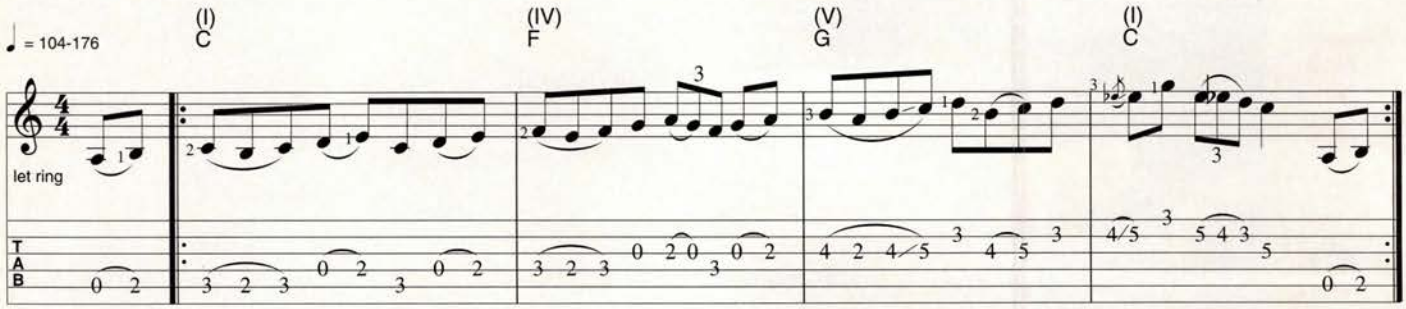
"One of the basic tenets of flatpicking is to maintain a connection between the notes," continues Sutton. "If your notes are choppy, people will find it difficult to listen to the melody. My goal is to play as smoothly as possible, so I try to give each note its full value *plus* a bit. [Plays **Ex. 2**.] You do this by holding fretted notes as long as possible. Don't automatically lift your finger from one note when you follow it with another—particularly when the second note is on a different string."

Squeezing extra value from a note requires finger independence. In bar 1, for example, once you've hit the second low *C* (beat two), hold it while you play through the rest of the measure. This scenario repeats itself in various ways throughout the phrase. Using this "park your finger until it's needed elsewhere" technique, you can sometimes nab as many as three or four eighth-notes worth of extra chime.

Ex. 1



Ex. 2



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Perpetual Motion

Even if you can only enhance a melody with an occasional eighth-note of extra sustain, you'll benefit from the subtle harmony.

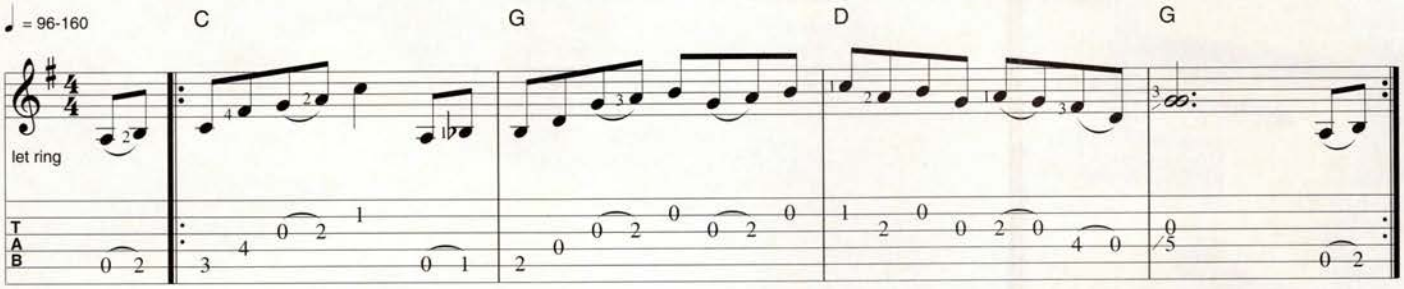
"You get a piano-like sound when one note rings into the next," Sutton elaborates. "It helps that many fiddle tunes—which form the backbone of the flatpicking repertoire—are in the keys of *G*, *D*, and *A*. This allows you to take advantage of open strings. For instance, I'm working on this B section to a fiddle tune in the key of *G* [plays **Ex. 3**]. At various points, the melody includes the open *A*, *D*, *G*, and *B* strings, and if you fret carefully, they'll sustain against the other notes. I'll practice a phrase like this over and over until it sinks down into my subconscious. Repetition is the key."

In bar 1, hold the deliciously clangorous *C*-*F*♯ tritone through beat three, and in bar 2, let the low *B* ring against the entire measure. To maximize sustain, arch your fingers and keep the hammers and pulls clean and strong.

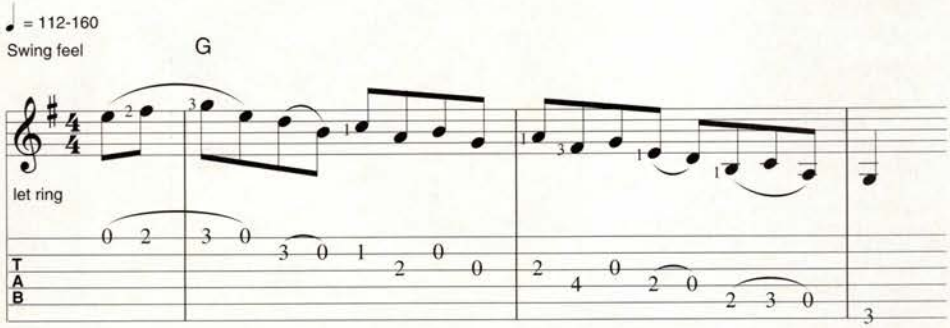
Fluid Picking Patterns

"For the most part, I use alternating pick-strokes," says Sutton. "In a line like this [plays **Ex. 4**], the hammers and pulls occur between the picked notes, but otherwise, it's straight up and down. But I have to say, I don't think about it too much—that can be counterproductive.

Ex. 3



Ex. 4



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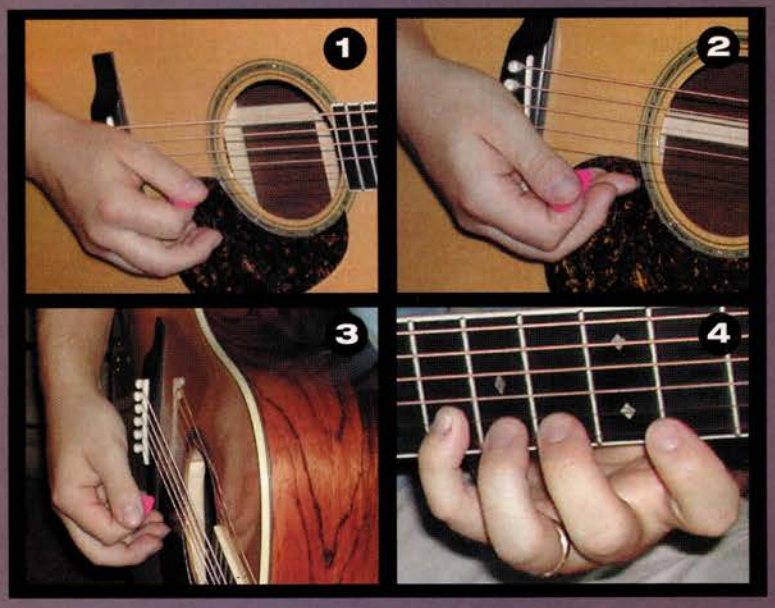

Dancing Hands

Sutton parks his right hand just behind the soundhole (Fig. 1). His pick contacts the strings about two inches from the saddle, traveling in a small arc as he moves from the first to the sixth string. "That's the sweet spot for bluegrass lead playing," he says. "It's where you find the right balance between rich tone and string tension."

When picking the bass strings, Sutton lightly anchors his ring finger and pinky against the first string (Fig. 2). He holds his wrist loosely above the bridgepins, sometimes lightly grazing them (Fig. 3).

Many flatpickers fret the strings at a 45-degree angle, using a hand position that's similar to a fiddle player. However, Sutton holds his fingers perpendicular to the strings (Fig. 4). "That comes from studying classical guitar," he says. "I have short fingers, and this hand position lets me reach the notes more easily." —AE

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Perpetual Motion

There's a rhythm you develop in the right hand, a momentum like when you drive over the cracks in the interstate and you hear that ka-*chunk*, ka-*chunk*. Feel it—don't force it. When I pick a bluesy bass run [plays **Ex. 5**], I focus on the sound, not the picking. Is the tone solid? Are the notes equally strong? Does it *roll*?"

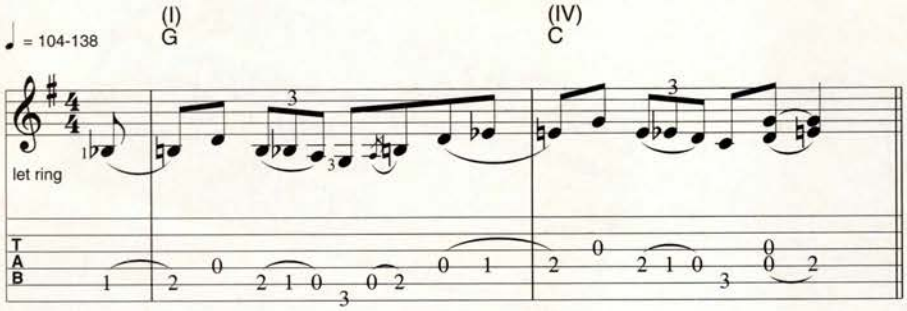
As you explore these two lines, you'll find that strict alternate picking feels natural and comfortable, even though the pattern is interrupted with numerous hammers and pulls. Ex. 5 begins with a pickup note on the *and* of four. When the first note is an upbeat, most players start with an upstroke, but don't feel obligated to adhere to this rule. "It's important to feel relaxed when you play," says Sutton, "and worrying about how, say, you start a phrase creates unnecessary mental tension. These details take care of themselves, if you let them. Just play and listen. Don't get too wrapped up in technique."

When it feels right, Sutton will lace his alternate picking with a burst of sweep picking. "I might sweep into a blues lick like this," he says, playing **Ex. 6**, "because it's so efficient. Also, the upstroke gives a cool, snappy sound to the opening notes that grabs your attention. And in this lick [plays **Ex. 7**], it makes sense to fall back across the strings. See how I'm using only one pickstroke per beat? My fretting hand plucks all the other notes. Lester Flatt came up with this classic lick [plays **Ex. 8**], which is a model of economy: You pick only three notes—the others are hammers, slides, or pulls—and you use your 1st finger to fret everything. In bluegrass, the speeds are such that when you play a fill, you have to dive back into the rhythm immediately. As a result, only the most streamlined licks get passed along."

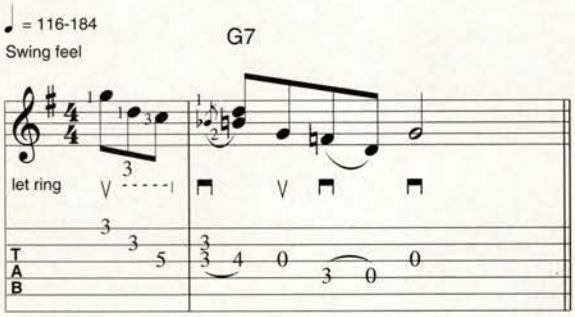
Crosspicking

Another important flatpicking technique, says Sutton, involves playing extended passages using only one note per string. Musically, this crosspicking approach resembles fingerpicking, but with a twist: Because each note is plucked with a flatpick, your right hand is forced to jump back and forth across the

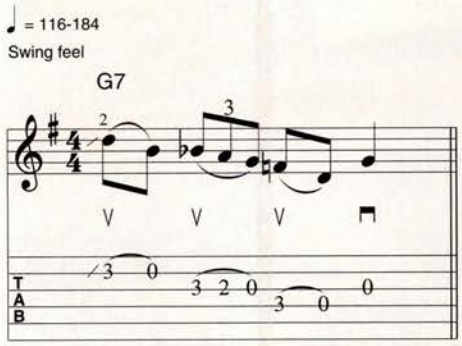
Ex. 5



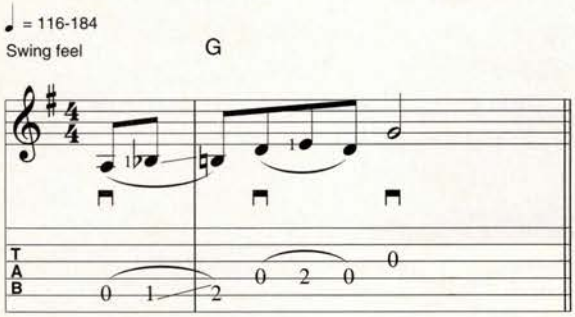
Ex. 6



Ex. 7



Ex. 8



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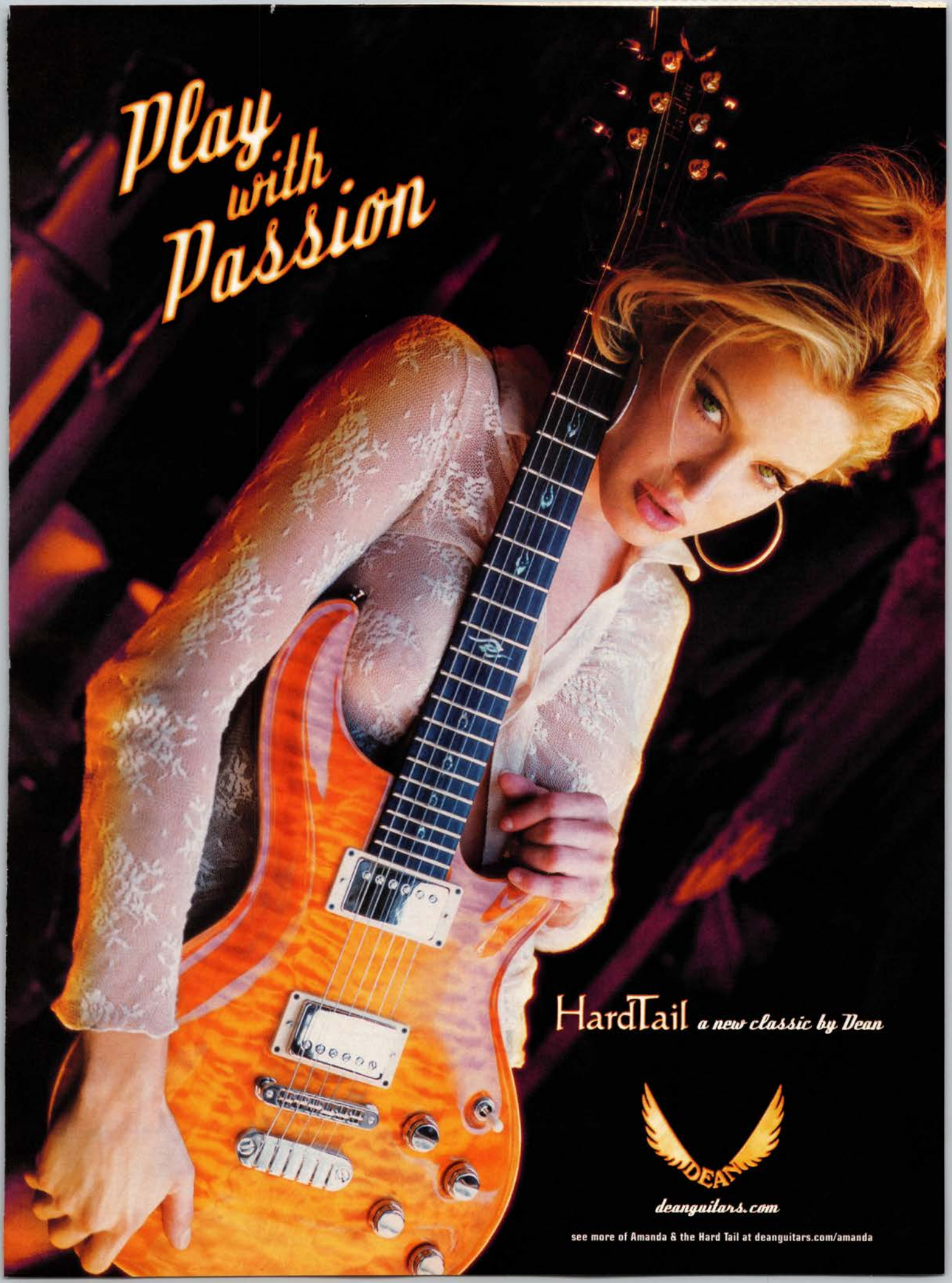
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strings. The challenge is to keep a steady rhythm, even when the gap required for each jump expands or contracts. The payoff is a bright, punchy stream of notes that packs more wallop than a similar fingerpicked phrase.

"Crosspicking started with George Shuffler," details Sutton, "who played guitar with the Stanley Brothers back in the '50s. He wanted to emulate the sound of a fingerpicked banjo, so he'd play through chord changes using a pattern of two downstrokes followed by an upstroke. It's one thing to nail all the notes when you're playing on adjacent strings. But when you start skipping strings, look out. [Plays **Ex. 9**.] You can do this with virtually any chord progression."

In this example, notice how Sutton starts on the fourth, third, and second strings, and then stretches his pattern out to the sixth and first strings. Play each beat as a triplet arpeggio, and mark time with a metronome set to a *slow* tempo—at first, anyway.

"When I crosspick, I tend to use alternate picking, as opposed to the triplet pattern," Sutton explains, as he plays **Ex. 10**. "That's more like Dan Crary, who is a major influence on my playing. It's a similar idea as the down-down-up approach, but with a more even rhythm."

Again, the trick is to manage the string skips without faltering rhythmically. Once you get the hang of this example, apply the crosspicking concept to other progressions. For a change of pace, try working from the outside to the inside strings.

The Inner Game

For Sutton, there's more to flatpicking than coordinating one's hands. "Flatpickers tend to make everything so tight, because they think it's all about speed. They wind up gritting their teeth and playing with contorted faces. When I teach flatpicking classes, I tell guitarists that the one way to make your playing better than it was ten minutes ago is reduce or eliminate all that tension. I don't want to get too Zen about this, but when you get outside yourself and focus your attention away from your own anxieties, the tension eases up. When you're playing with other people, for instance, listen to what they're doing and try to complement what is going on around you musically at that moment. Embrace the idea that the sound is a collective effort. It really helps. I had to struggle with this myself—the bluegrass guitar scene has a gunslinger mentality—so I know it's not just an abstract theory. Reading *The Inner Game of Music* [by Barry Green and Timothy Gallwey] helped me discover that playing isn't about impressing people with monster technique. The true art of flatpicking is making something hard sound simple."

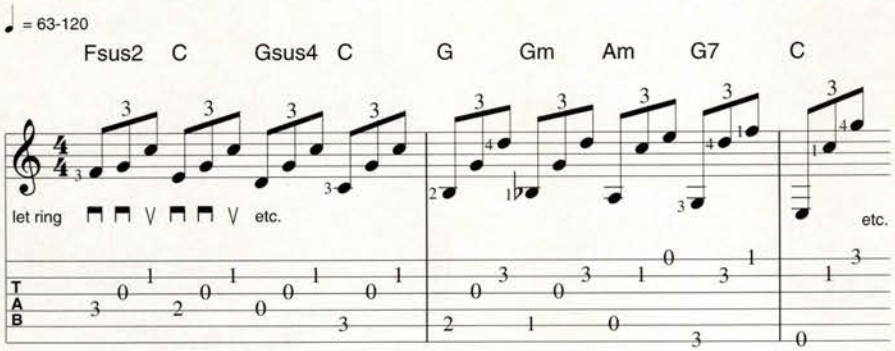
Picks of the Litter

Sutton's main bluegrass flat-top is a Bourgeois D-150 dreadnought with a red spruce top and Brazilian rosewood back and sides. He also owns two other Bourgeois guitars—a slope-shoulder dreadnought (dubbed the "banjo killer") and a smaller OM model, which he uses for fingerpicking. When playing Gypsy jazz, Sutton wields a Dupont MD-50—a French Selmer/Maccaferri-style 6-string. Sutton uses McKinney capos, L.R. Baggs preamps and pickups, and his flat-tops sport D'Addario medium gauge (.013-.056) strings.

"The sound of the bluegrass dreadnought is maximized with medium-gauge strings and a heavy pick," he asserts. "For me, a flatpick shouldn't give against the strings, but it should flex a little bit when you bend it over your thumb. I find that a 1.14 mm plastic pick provides the right combination of stiffness and flexibility."

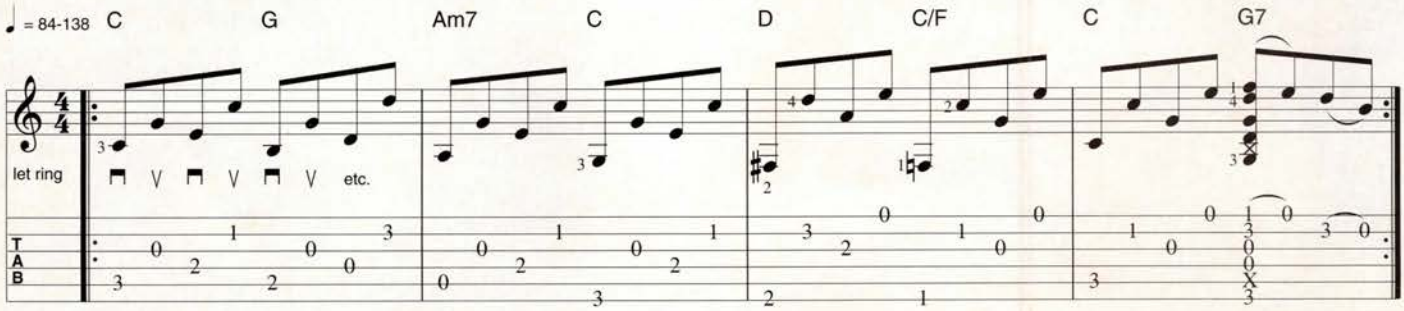
—AE

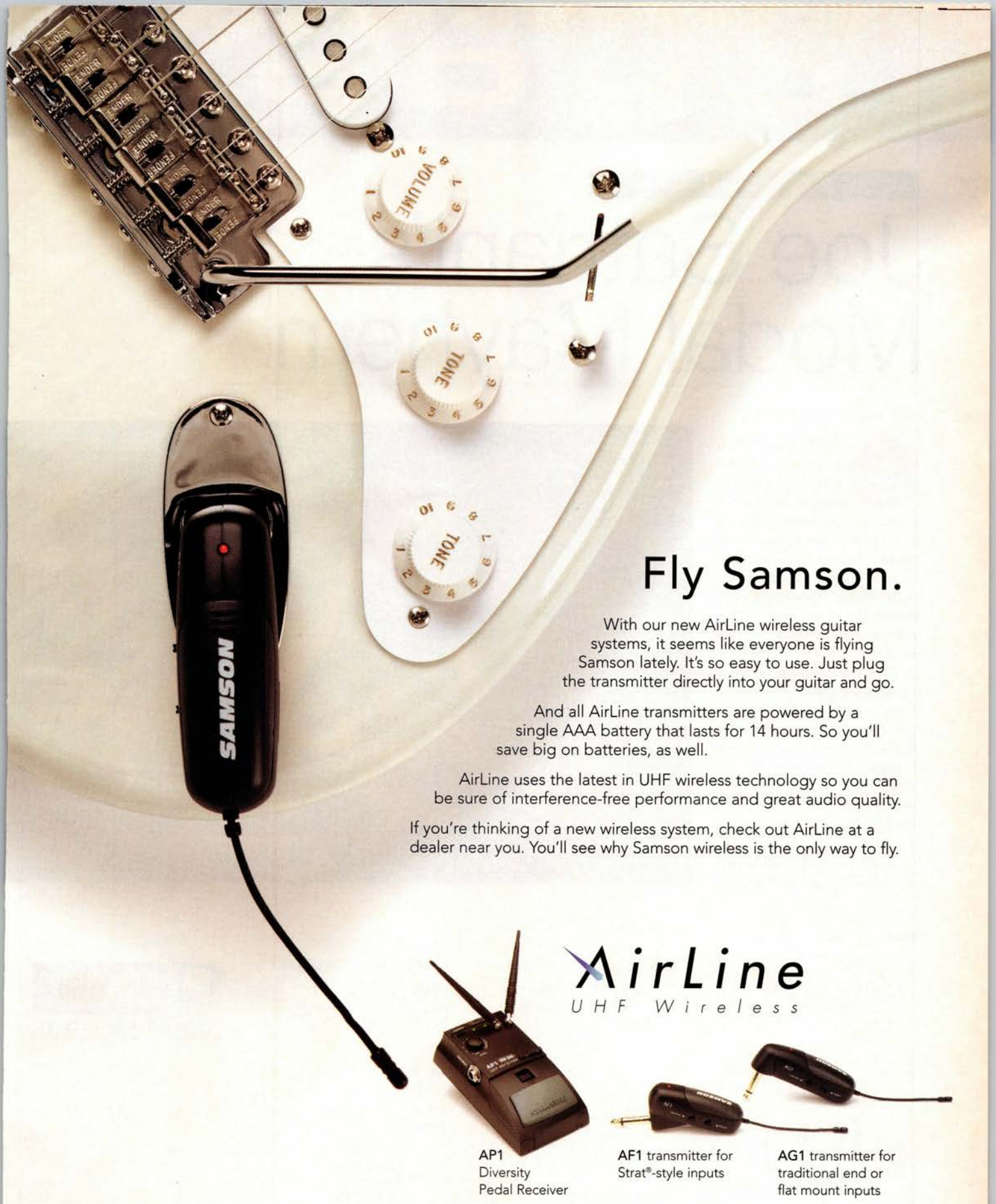
Ex. 9



audio version available!
truefire.com

Ex. 10





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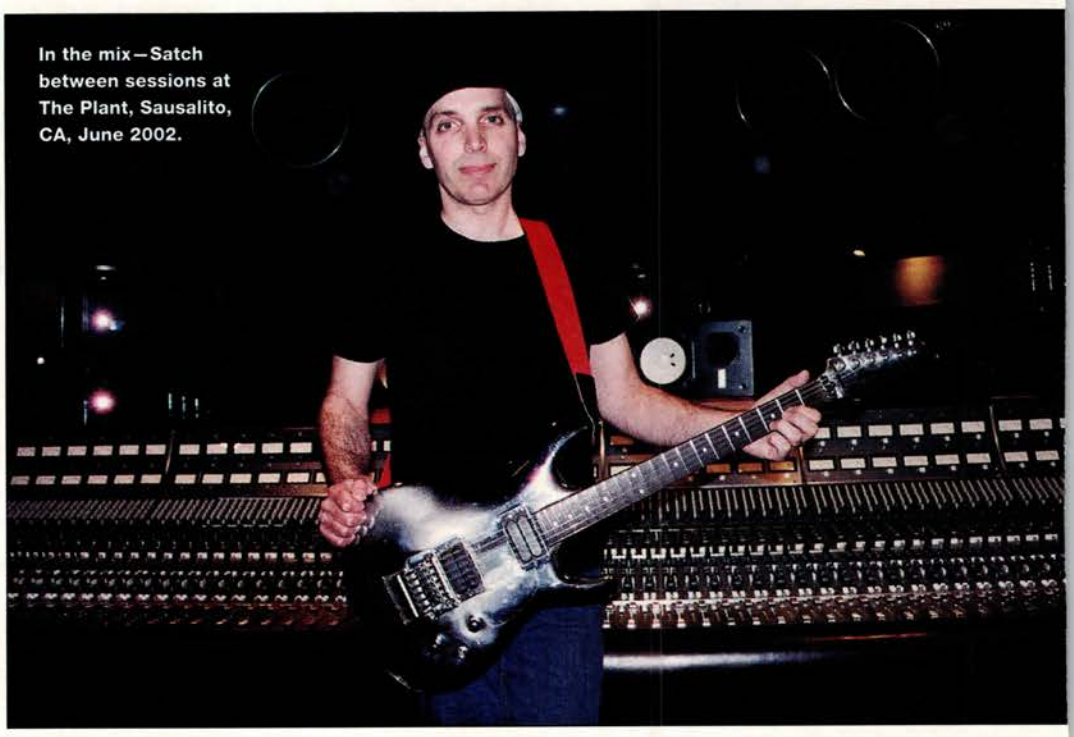
GUEST GURU

Joe Satriani's Modal Mayhem

BY JUDE GOLD

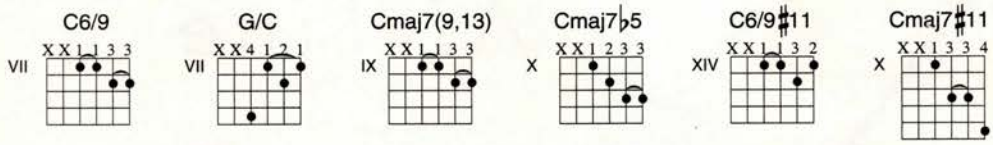
"JUST BECAUSE A groove is in *C* doesn't mean that you *have* to play an ordinary *C* chord," says Joe Satriani. "When I was in high school, I got a copy of *Joe Pass Guitar Chords* [Mel Bay] and every night I played through all the voicings on each page. I had no idea what I was doing, but three weeks later I suddenly knew a ton of *C* flavors—like these [plays **Ex. 1**]. When I was jamming with some friends a few days later, I played a couple of Pass' voicings and it added so much that everybody just flipped. They were like, 'Where the hell did you learn that?' All I did was play an easy *A* minor thing, like this [plays **Ex. 2**]. Aside from the third grip, every chord has the same shape and fingering."

As anyone familiar with Satriani is well aware, the guitar hero's modal

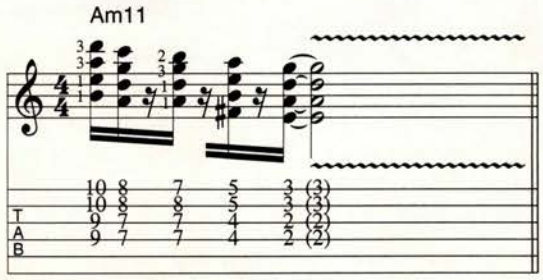


In the mix—Satch between sessions at The Plant, Sausalito, CA, June 2002.

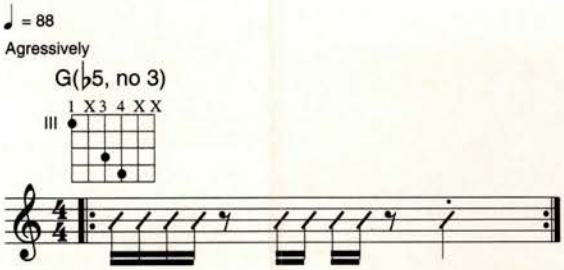
Ex. 1



Ex. 2



Ex. 3



INCOMING!

"This would be a lot easier if I had three hands," says Satriani, creating a dive-bombing effect by plucking a false harmonic on the *G* string with his picking hand, while riding the vibrato bar with his fretting hand. "I produce harmonics by choking up on the pick, and hitting the string with both the pick and the underside of my thumb. Once you get comfortable with your fretting hand on the bar, you can use it to coax short melodies out of harmonics."

fireworks burst way outside the confines of Western harmony. "Check out this groove," says Satriani, playing **Ex. 3**. "The rhythm is inspired by Rage Against the Machine, and the chord, *G(♭5, no 3)*, has only two different notes in it—*G*, which appears in two octaves, and *D♭*, which together create a tritone. If a scale is made up of seven degrees, then this grip leaves five of those pitches completely up for grabs, allowing you the freedom to build a number of different scales or harmonies in the ear of the listener.

"For starters, you can always make pentatonic moves work if you play them with the right conviction," says Satriani, illustrating with a flurry of Hendrix-inspired blues riffs. "But I hear many other possibilities, starting with the Lydian mode, which because of its raised 4, suits our chord perfectly. Lower the scale's 7, and you get an even more interesting sound—Lydian dominant [**Ex. 4a**]. Or, I might play what I call the 'symmetrical' scale [**Ex. 4b**], which is also known as the fully diminished or 'half-step/whole-step' scale. Some of these sounds may seem strange or exotic to American ears, but they're great ways to capture people's attention and get them to hinge on your every note, wondering what you're going to play next."

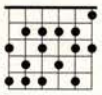
Satriani employs Ex. 4b's scale in several slick ways. "It's good for creating harmonic confusion," he offers. "I use it for improvised, jazzy sounding lines like this one [plays **Ex. 5**]. I also might use it for an exciting intro cadenza [demonstrates with **Ex. 6**]. This lick works its way down the symmetrical scale starting well above the 12th fret. Every third note is a pull-off to the open *G* string, but the strong beats come every *four* notes, so this approach generates rhythmic intrigue. Then, without leaving the third string, I might slide around like a sitar player and introduce *new* scale degrees, such as the major 7, *F♯* [plays **Ex. 7**]."

The next challenge is improvising over shifting harmonies, as Satriani does on "Belly Dancer," from his new album *Strange Beautiful Music* [Epic]. "That song is constantly moving through different tonalities," he observes. "Soloing over it is fun but risky—it's a bit like dodging bullets. In the early days of Metallica, Kirk Hammet used to bring in rehearsal tapes and say, 'Man, I gotta solo over this riff—what *key* is it in?' The answer would usually be more than one. That makes things trickier, because there's no one scale that will save your butt."

Check out Joe Satriani's new book/CD package Jam with Joe Satriani *[Cherry Lane].*

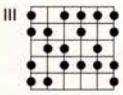
Ex. 4a

G Lydian dominant scale

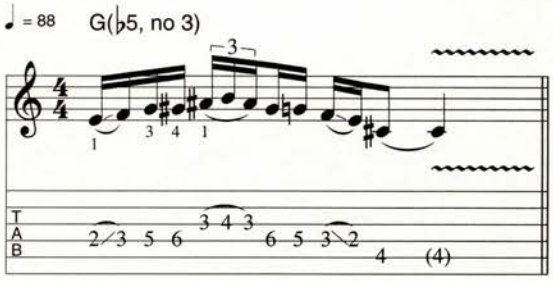


Ex. 4b

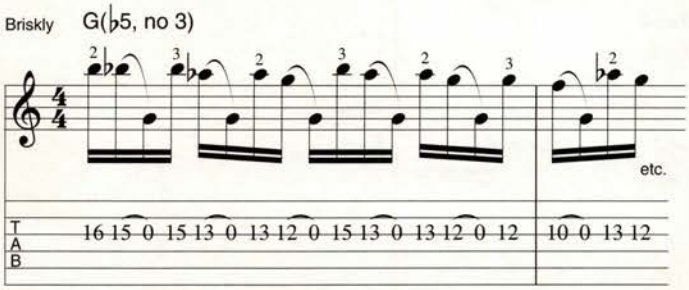
G Symmetrical scale



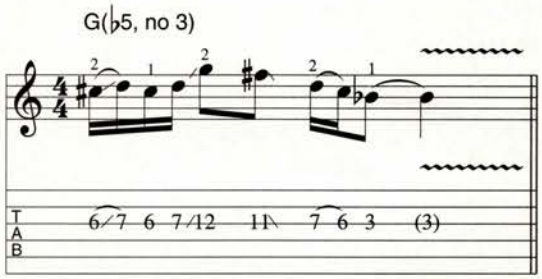
Ex. 5



Ex. 6



Ex. 7

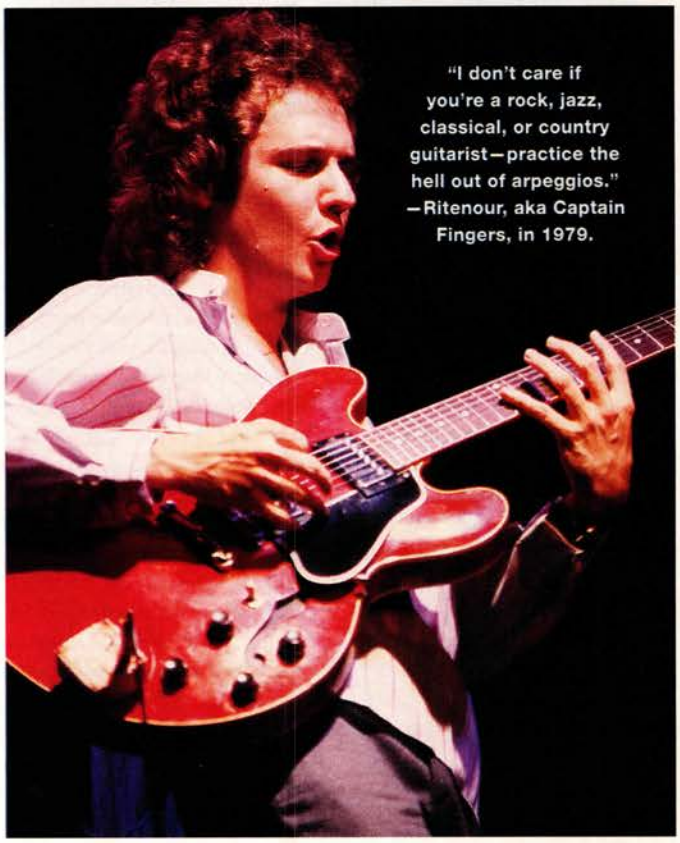


PHOTOS: JUDE GOLD

CLASSIC COLUMN

Understanding Arpeggios

BY LEE RITENOUR



"I don't care if you're a rock, jazz, classical, or country guitarist—practice the hell out of arpeggios." —Ritenour, aka Captain Fingers, in 1979.

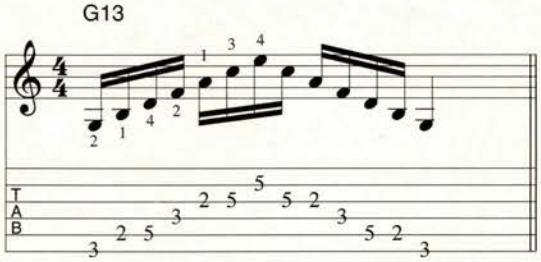
LET'S FACE it, "arpeggios" sounds like a pretty heady subject. What's it got to do with playing in bands, doing recording sessions, and being a versatile player? The point is that most guitarists who skip over this subject have a blind spot in their playing that will show up eventually. This article's focus is not to introduce you to the many different arpeggios—your teacher or any of several books can do that. What I *would* like to make you aware of is the fact that scales and arpeggios are essentially the same thing.

First, a small lesson in theory. Take a *C* major diatonic scale—*C, D, E, F, G, A,* and *B*. Seven notes, right? On each degree, you can build a chord simply by adding thirds on top of each other. If, for example, you continually add thirds on top of *C*, you would build from *C* to *E*, *E* to *G*, *G* to *B*, *B* to *D*, *D* to *F*, and *F* to *A*, all of which are intervals of major or minor thirds. The resulting chord, *C-E-G-B-D-F-A*, contains all seven tones of the *C* major scale simply arranged in a different sequence.

Now, apply this same "stacking thirds" approach to the 5th degree of the *C* major scale, *G*. The end result will be a *G13* chord spelled *G-B-D-F-A-C-E*. Again, it's simply a *C* major scale in a different sequence. Let's see where this *G13* arpeggio leads us. From the root position, play the thirds melodically

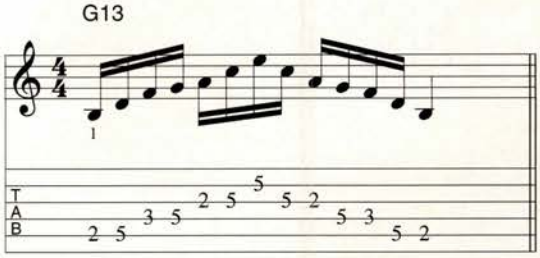
Ex. 1

Root position



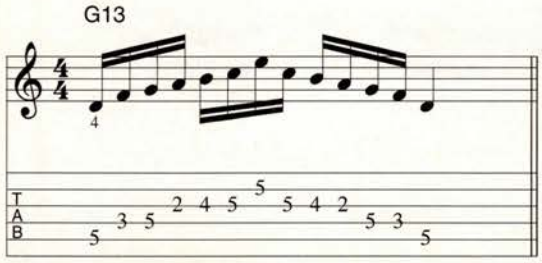
Ex. 2

First inversion



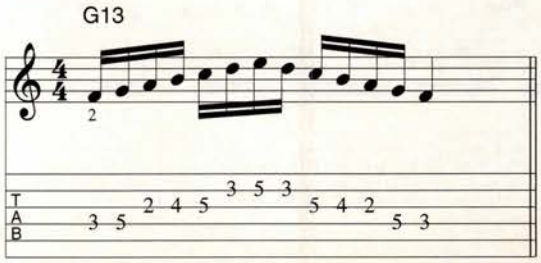
Ex. 3

Second inversion



Ex. 4

Third inversion



RITENOUR PHOTO: NEIL ZLOZOWER

ascending and descending, as in **Ex. 1**. For the first inversion (**Ex. 2**), start on the 3 of the scale (*B*) and invert the root (*G*) up one octave, placing it in correct sequence within the arpeggio. For the second inversion (**Ex. 3**), start on the 5 of the scale (*D*) and invert the 3 and the root up one octave. To play the third inversion (**Ex. 4**), start the arpeggio on the 7 (*F*) and invert the root, 3, and 5, up one octave. Notice that the third-inversion arpeggio is the *C* major scale starting on the note *F* (this is also called the *F* Lydian mode).

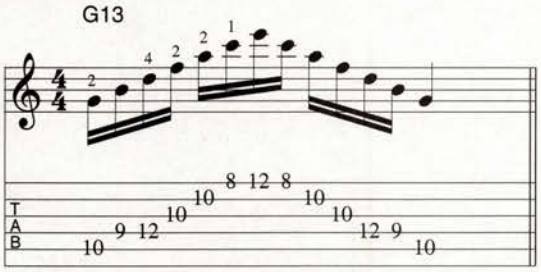
Still with me? Try playing arpeggios elsewhere on the neck or adding altered tones. **Ex. 5** is the *G13* arpeggio from Ex. 1 up an octave. **Ex. 6** adds a lowered 5 and raised 9.

Arpeggios are probably the hardest exercises to play well on the guitar. A piano player or horn player can whip off arpeggios like guitarists could never dream of. If you practice building arpeggios on all the diatonic tones of major and minor scales, and also make sure they're played over the entire neck of the guitar, you will *guarantee* yourself huge musical—and probably financial—dividends. Good luck!

This column ran in the July '79 GP. *Lee Ritenour's latest album is* Rit's House *[GRP].*

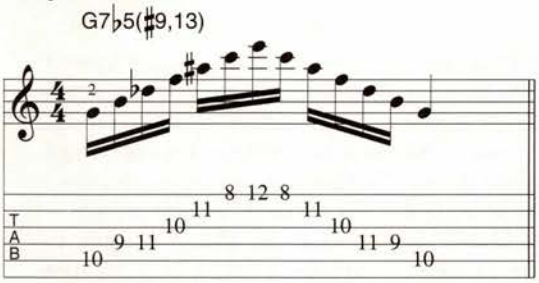
Ex. 5

Up an octave



Ex. 6

Adding altered tones



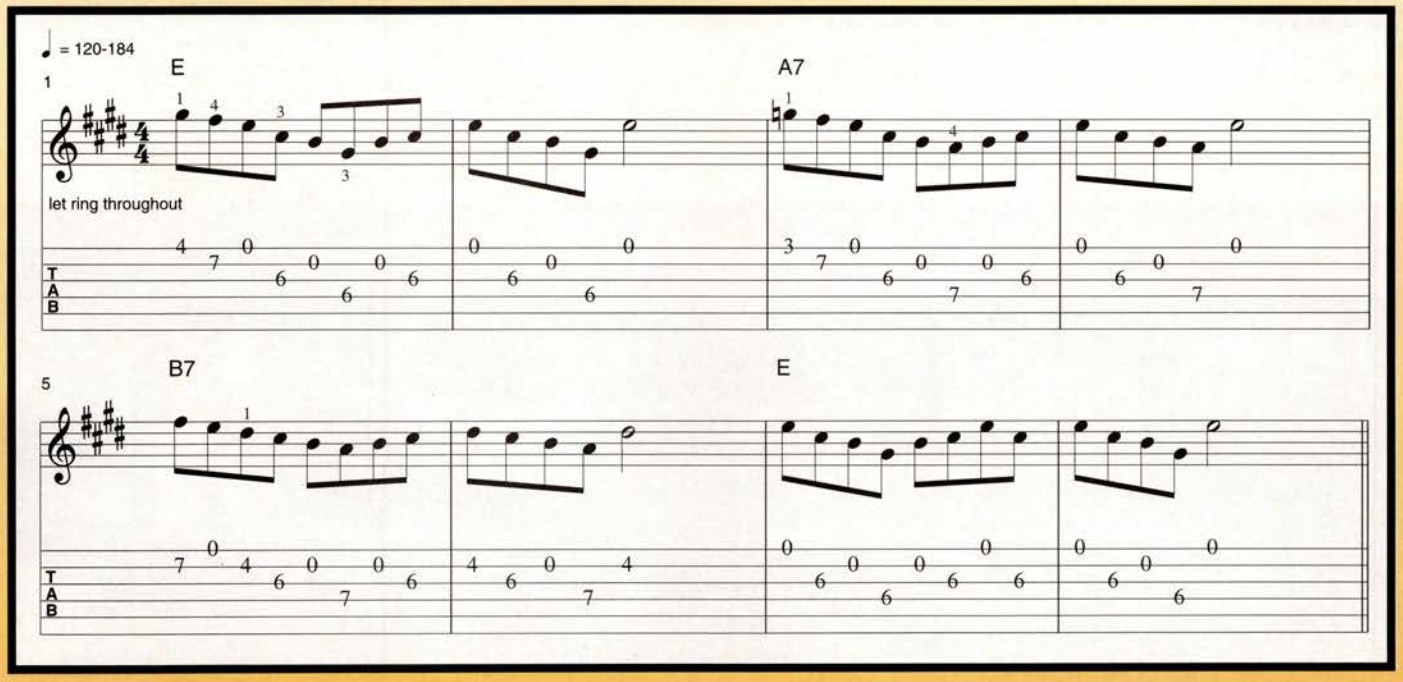
READER'S CHALLENGE • WIND WALKER

IF THERE WERE SUCH THING AS MAGICAL WIND CHIMES THAT could play lyrical melodies over an *E-A7-B7* progression, Ron Koop of Vancouver, British Columbia, knows exactly what they would sound like. "This lick is a great jumping-off point for anyone wanting to learn cascades," says Koop. "Once you get the hang of arching your fingers and mixing open strings with fretted notes, the possibilities are endless."

Tip: For increased sparkle, try these moves higher on the neck using a capo.

Want to help the world play better guitar? Submit your candidate for Reader's Challenge (preferably notated *and* on cassette or CD), along with a brief explanation of why it's cool and how to play it, to *Guitar Player Reader's Challenge*, 2800 Campus Dr., San Mateo, CA 94403. Include your name, address, e-mail, and phone number. Materials won't be returned, but we *will* listen to all submissions. You'll hear from us if your lick is chosen.

THIS MONTH'S PRIZE: A custom electric guitar from Route101guitars.com.



SONIC SNAPSHOT

Wes Montgomery's Magic Box

BY JUDE GOLD

MOST GUITARISTS recognize the shape in **Ex. 1** as the *E* minor pentatonic scale—and with good reason. After all, it *is* the world's most popular launching pad for rock solos and blues leads in the key of *E*. More advanced players know that the same notes also spell the *G* major pentatonic scale—*G* being the relative major of *E* minor. But if you take this scale and "fill in the blanks" with passing tones—which are represented by the circles on the grid in **Ex. 2**—you'll open up a world of melodic possibility. And without ever stepping out of this twelfth-position "box," you'll have access to some of the most swingin' guitar lines ever—namely, those played by the great Wes Montgomery.

Ex. 2's shape is easy to learn—it simply calls for four notes per string, with each finger covering one fret. The trick is in knowing how to use each pitch—each *color*—melodically. With its many passing tones, the box's obvious application is in chromatic phrases, such as the one Montgomery played in **Ex. 3**.

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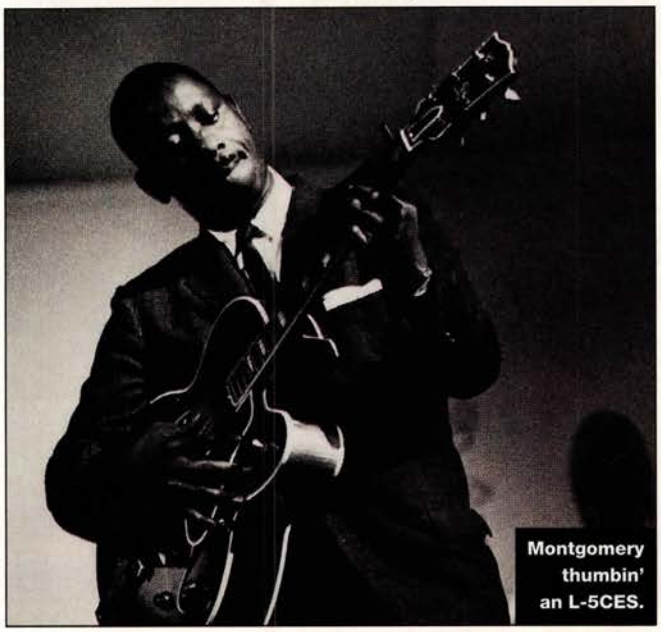
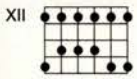


Montgomery thumbin' an L-5CES.

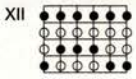
Ex. 1

E minor/G major Pentatonic scale

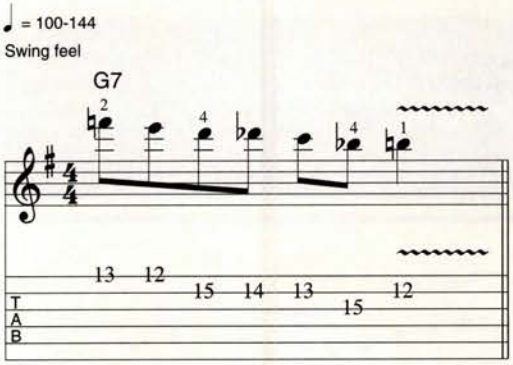


Ex. 2

Adding passing tones

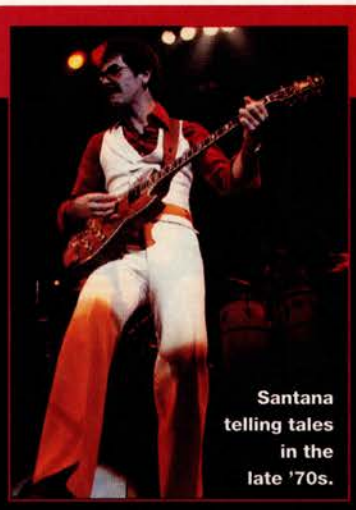


Ex. 3



TIPS JAR • CARLOS SANTANA

"The point of music is to tell stories with a melody," said Carlos Santana in the June '78 *GP*. "All that stuff about playing notes, to me, is just like watching some cat pick up weights. After a while, who wants to see somebody flex their muscles? There are thousands of guitar players out there, but really only about 30 you can listen to and tell instantly who they are. It took me a while to realize that having your own individuality is a very beautiful gift—even if you only know three notes."



Santana telling tales in the late '70s.

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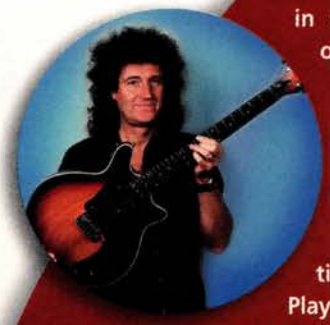

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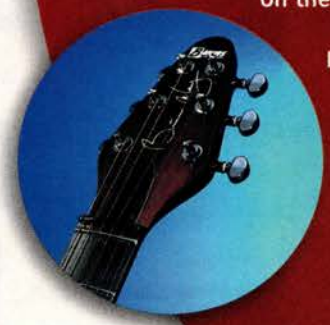

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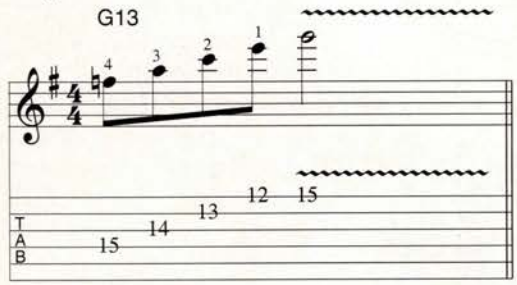
SONIC SNAPSHOT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 98

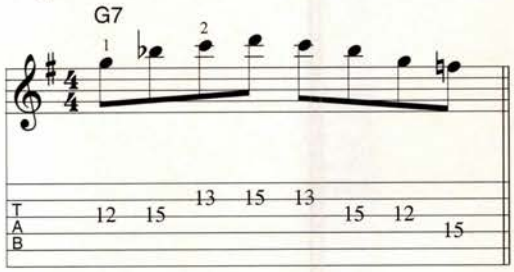
Over *G7*, this meandering line starts on the ♭7, *F*, and works its way down to the minor 3, *B♭*, before ultimately tagging the major 3, *B*. But chromaticism is just one of this box's many capabilities. Montgomery also used this position to generate tasty arpeggios such as **Ex. 4**, where he successively tags the ♭7, 9, 11, 13, and tonic of *G13* with a fun-to-play, stacked-thirds fingering. And deriving *G* minor pentatonic blues licks from the box is a cinch if you know—as Montgomery did so well—which pitches to play (**Ex. 5**).

To really hear the power of this box in action, dive into **Ex. 6**, which demonstrates Montgomery's amazing gift for generating endless streams of lyrical eighth-notes that stay in position. First, play through the accompanying chords, which comprise the first four bars of a jazz-blues progression in *G*. Then, test-drive Montgomery's flowing phrase and listen for how it effortlessly nails the chord changes. The only challenge will be determining if these smooth moves are easier on your fingers or your ears.

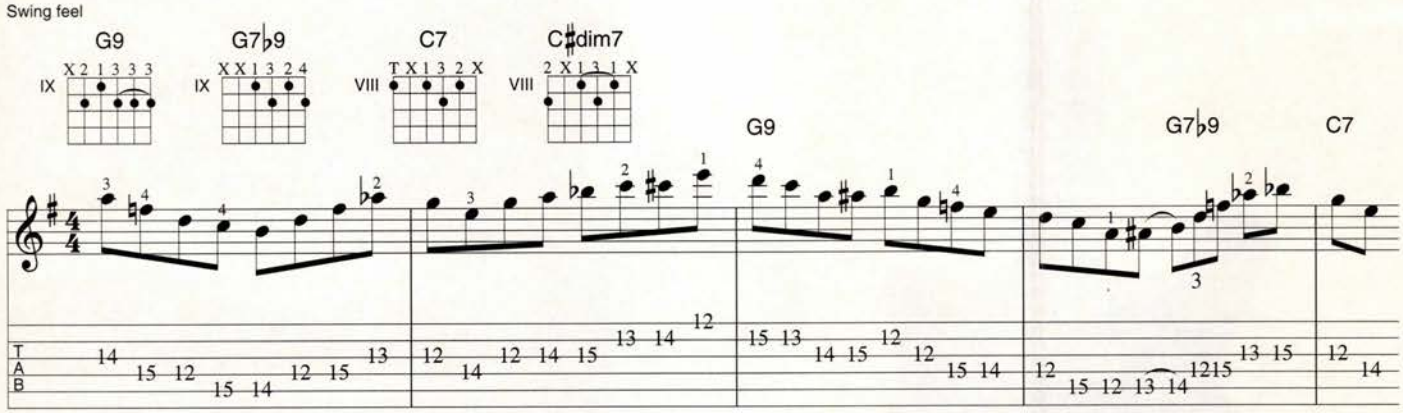
Ex. 4



Ex. 5



Ex. 6



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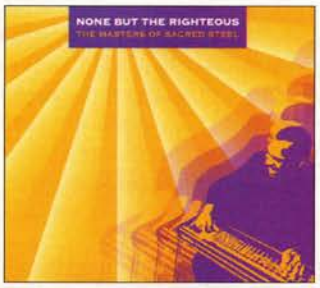

Various Artists
None but the Righteous: The Masters of Sacred Steel

You'd have to be a statue to sit still when any of the soul-stirring grooves from this collection is wailing from your CD player. Featuring soaring slide solos, roaring riffs, and impassioned vocals in praise of the Holy Ghost, these uplifting gospel jams can make wallpaper dance. What *None but the Righteous* doesn't feature, however, is guitar. The compilation's focus is on the transcendent, improvisational music that has been brewing in select churches since the late '30s, when African-American gospel musicians first got their hands on pedal and lap-steel guitars.

"The reason it took so long for the rest of the world to discover this music is that sacred steelers rarely played outside of the church," says pedal-steelist extraordinaire Chuck Campbell of The Campbell Brothers band. (Chuck and his brother Darick are two of the eight steelers featured on the CD.) "In fact, we rarely even played in *other* church organizations. If we did bring a steel to, say, a Catholic church, where the pipe organ is supreme, the place simply would not start rocking like our church does. At our services, anything can happen."

"Our booking agent put it the best when he said, 'You guys come from a jam-band church,'" adds Phil Campbell, who backs his brothers' lap steel antics with guitar, bass, and keyboard textures generated entirely with a MIDI-equipped Brian Moore electric. "And he's right, because we have these long instrumental jams that are just extensions of whatever the congregational song was."

The Campbell Brothers of the House of God, Keith Dominion, Rush, New York—Chuck, Phil, Carlton, and Darick Campbell (left to right) surround singer Katie Jackson with a joyful noise.

While these steel-powered, high-revving houses of worship have been around for decades, it wasn't until folklorist Bob Stone discovered Florida steelers Aubrey Ghent and the late Glenn Lee in the early '90s that the genre—later christened "sacred steel" by its first label proponent, Arhoolie Records—began receiving widespread recognition. One guy who has become a rabid steel-head is jazz hipster and B-3 bomber John Medeski, who formed The Word, featuring stellar young steeler Robert Randolph. Medeski hand-culled the 17 cuts on *None but the Righteous* from Arhoolie's multiple *Sacred Steel* releases. In addition to tracks by the Campbell Brothers, Ghent, and Lee, the album serves up hot performances by Maurice "Ted" Beard, Calvin Cooke, Willie Eason, and Sonny Treadway.

Here, Chuck and Phil Campbell shed light on all things sacred.

• • • • • • • • • • • • • • •

How did steel guitars make their way into the hands of black church musicians?

Phil: The original sound started in the '30s with Willie Eason.

Chuck: He evolved it into the style that you hear on this CD. His brother, Truman, loved

PHOTO: COURTESY OF BIG HASSLE MEDIA

Hawaiian music so much that he got a lap steel and learned to play in that style. Willie, on the other hand, also started playing, but *he* learned to use the steel to mimic the singers of the Church. When Willie finally played for his congregation, people went wild because it sounded so much like a voice. From that day on, Willie was the *man*. He traveled all over the country—mostly in the South—popularizing steel in the Church.

What are guitar players most struck by the first time they hear sacred steel?

Phil: They're blown away by the lead lines—not to mention the pure soul of the music. Back in the late '70s, when I was still in high school, I was telling my brother, "You know, if only the world could hear you guys playing these instruments the way you do! These are the hottest leads ever." At the time, I was studying guys like Al Di Meola, George Benson, Larry Carlton, and Carlos Santana, and as striking as all those players are, they still didn't match the expressiveness I would hear in church every Sunday listening to guys like my brother—or anyone else on *None but the Righteous*.

Chuck, you get an amazing train-whistle sound on "Morning Train."

Chuck: That's a Morley wah. A lot of steelers use wahs. Willie Eason has always given his lap steel more expression by using its volume control to create swells. Then, his protégé, Henry Nelson—who was Aubrey Ghent's father—started using the tone control on his lap steel like a wah, which is what my brother does. Another thing I use is an EBow. The first time I played that in church, everyone went berserk because they thought it was a soprano singing.

What kind of amps do steelers favor?

Chuck: Guitar amps. Peavey is a staple—I plug Carter and Sierra pedal steels into a Peavey Musician head and a Mesa/Boogie closed-back 1x12 cabinet. Or, I'll use a Fender Twin or a Roland Jazz Chorus. My recording amp is a THD UniValve.

What do you think about sacred steel being played outside of the Church?

Phil: It's great. We play everywhere. We've even been fortunate enough to play the Hollywood Bowl.

Chuck: Steelers *do* have individual thresholds of where they will and won't play, though. Robert Randolph, for example, is a young guy who has never really professed to be born again, so he might play more bars and clubs then we do. Aubrey Ghent, on the other hand, is a minister so he'll likely stay closer to the church. But we're *all* committed to getting the music out there. And everyone who visits our church tells us they can really feel something in the music. A good example is Jim Campilongo. He came and played guitar with us and was so inspired, he went back to San Francisco and found a church to play in. We've realized that, for us, the church is in some ways like a steady bar gig is for most musicians—it may not be the best paying gig or the biggest stage, but you do it because it keeps your chops up, you love playing with other people, and you love reacting to an audience. **Ropeadope.** —JUDE GOLD

Paul Asbell

Steel String Americana

Solo acoustic guitarists tend to specialize in one genre, but Paul Asbell delights in exploring a spectrum of styles. With steady hands and a relaxed sense of swing, he tackles bouncy ragtime fingerpicking, crisp flatpicking, and lush, jazzy chording with equal aplomb. In the pensive medley, "Down in the Valley to Pray/Jesus, Make Up My Dyin' Bed," he shifts effortlessly from droning Appalachian melodies to Blind

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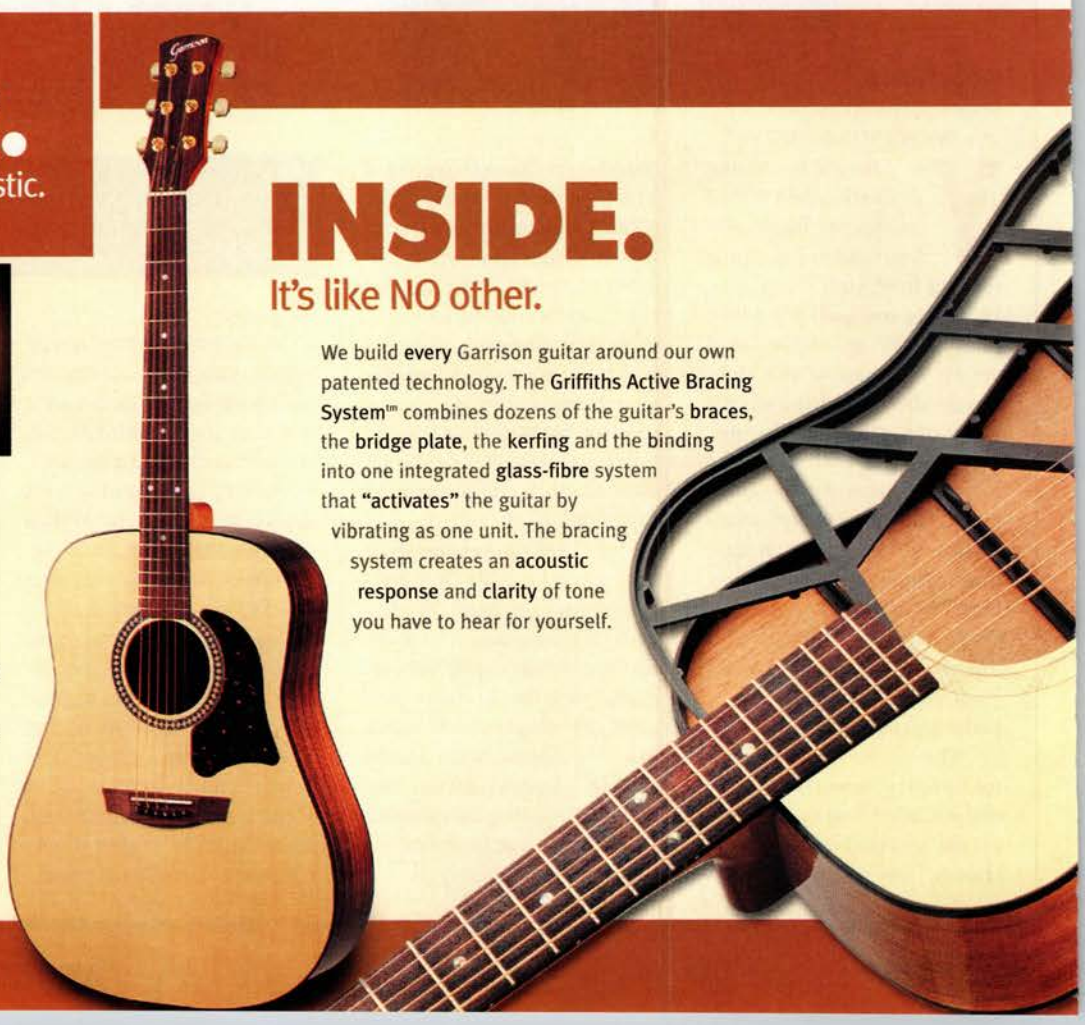

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QUICK HITS

Of Montreal, *Aldhils Arboretum*. The spirits of Syd Barrett, the Move, and all things Brit-psychedelic permeate every stitch of this guitar-rich record. **Kindercore**. —DF

The Soft Boys, *Nextdoorland*. It has been 22 years since their last record, but Robyn Hitchcock and Kimberly Rew haven't missed a beat. Their spiky guitar interplay has gotten even *cooler*. Woefully under-appreciated in the '80s, maybe the world is ready for the Soft Boys now. **Matador**. —DF

Gov't Mule, *The Deep End*. Featuring nearly as many guest bassists as songs, Gov't Mule's latest release is a powerful jam fest that's cool, hard, funky, heavy, trippy, and rife with great guitar playing by Warren Haynes. **BMG**. —AT

The Jay Azzolina Trio, *Live at One Station Plaza*. Cushioned by the clicky chords and inky bass of a Hammond B-3, and using tones that blend old-school, Blue Note warmth with swirling, NYC-style modulated delay, jazzbo Azzolina coaxes long, cunning phrases from his archtop PRS. **Azziz**. —AE

Cave In, *Tides of Tomorrow*. This energetic, guitar-driven quartet pumps out tasty modern rock nuggets—including a cover of Giants Chair's "Callus"—with touches of psychedelia, noise rock, and even a few jazz chords thrown in for good measure. **Hydra Head**. —BC

Willie Johnson-inspired blues riffs. Asbell's 6-string sounds like a stride piano in a snappy tribute to the great Blind Blake, yet quivering echoes of Django abound in "Stardust." Asbell—who began his career backing Otis Rush and Magic Sam in Chicago blues clubs—knows how to sneak passing chords and moving bass lines into his arrangements without obscuring the melody or cluttering the groove. Fretting a bevy of vintage Martins and boutique flat-tops, Asbell reveals his mastery of dynamics, phrasing, and timbres on this impressive debut. **Busy Hands.** —ANDY ELLIS

The Slip

Angels Come on Time

There's no pigeonholing the Slip. Are they jammy-pop songsters à la Dave Matthews or fusion revivalists hell-bent on *Jack Johnson*-era Miles? The answer to that question is simply, "yes!" On *Angels Come on Time*, guitarist Brad Barr busts out his acoustic slide chops, clean-toned bop escapades, ethereal volume swells,

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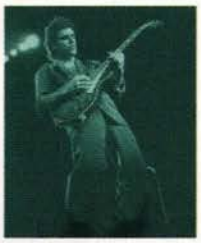

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and—oh yeah—he plays banjo, too. Barr is an amazing player who can musically multitask and never lose his identity. As a band, the Slip are much the same, jumping willy-nilly between more traditional pop song structures and free-form improvisation—often in the same tune—yet they're able to keep the proceedings surprisingly cohesive, and *always* funky. **Ryko.** —DARRIN FOX

Black Sabbath
Past Lives

Forget the silly demonic overtones and the fact that their former lead singer (and his family) are TV celebrities, Black Sabbath are arguably the most influential hard rock band ever. *Past Lives* is a two-disc set that's culled from various sources. Disc one is actually the "unofficial" 1980 album *Live at Last*, and disc two consists of various performances recorded between 1970 and 1978.

All of the usual suspects are here—"Iron Man," "Paranoid," and "Sweet Leaf"—as are some slightly lesser-known gems such as "Megalomania," and "Cornucopia." The boys from Birmingham are in top form on nearly all of *Past Live*'s tracks (although the sound quality of the recordings is sub-par—particularly on disc two). In fact, the version of "Symptom of the Universe" is absolutely *killing*, and it was recorded at a time when Sabbath was beginning to unravel.

Throughout the tracks, Tony Iommi reminds us that a heavy guitar tone doesn't necessarily consist of tight bottom-end and a lot of percussive attack. Iommi's sound is unruly, thick with distortion, and huge. Something else of interest: Instead of playing their songs faster to energize concert crowds, Sabbath actually played *slower*, which gave their already heavy dirges more weight and power. **Sanctuary.** —DARRIN FOX

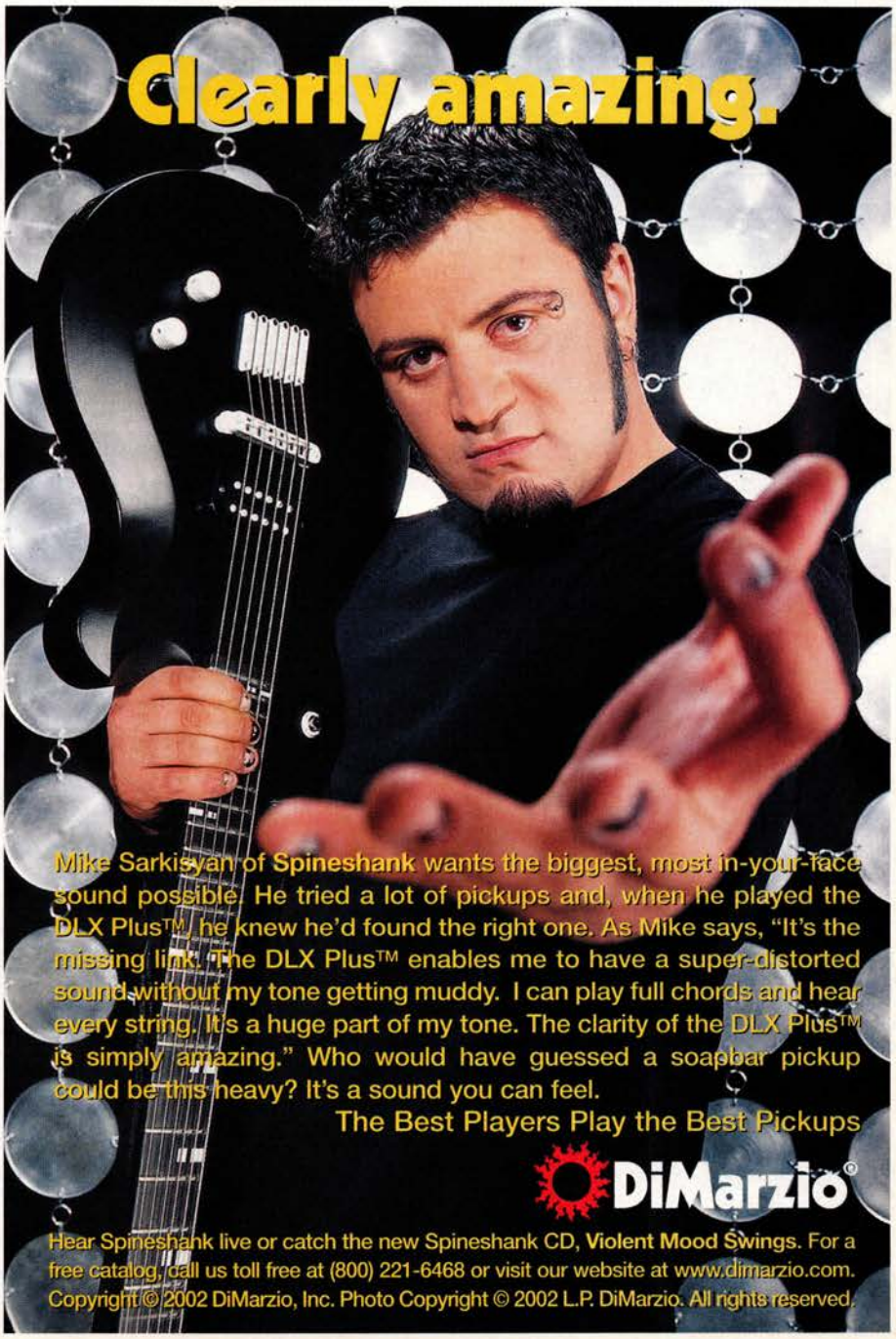
Various Artists
Dressed in Black: A Tribute to Johnny Cash

Every now and then a tribute album succeeds in its mission, and the soulful interpretations of Cash classics on *Dressed in Black* totally hit the mark. Highlights of the 18-song album include "Wreck of the Old '97" by Hank IiI (grandson of you know who), "Train of Love" (featuring superb playing by guitarist Kenny Vaughan), "Get Rhythm" by Rev. Horton Heat, "Cry, Cry, Cry" by Robbie Fulks, and "Big River" (which spotlights Rosie Flores on vocals and guitar). With added attractions by Dale Watson, Redd Volkaert, Billy Burnette, and Los Straightjackets' Eddie Angel, *Dressed in Black* celebrates Cash's immense contributions to country music while standing out as fine record in its own right. **Dualtone.** —ART THOMPSON

Steve Trovato
About Time. . .

The debut album by this amazing picker

(who is also a USC guitar instructor and an acclaimed studio player) is a stylistically diverse work that shows Trovato's total command of everything from blues to high-octane country to Gypsy jazz. Affectionately known as the "Great Chameleon," Trovato backs up the title by demonstrating just how damn good he is at, well, just about *everything*.



Trovato tips his hat to Danny Gatton on "D.G.'s Boogie" and tears into the Jimmy Bryant lane on the country-jazz ripper, "Squawkin." He plays soulfully on the bluesy numbers "Knock, Knock, Knock" and "Drowning in My Own Tears," and goes *deep* into the Django zone on the classic "Dark Eyes." Trovato's ability to play so sensitively one moment (as on "Somewhere Over the Rainbow") and so furiously the next ("Root Beer Rag") is simply astonishing. What can you say? A new superpicker has arrived! **stevetrovato.com.** —ART THOMPSON

Various Artists

Hey Bo Diddley—A Tribute

Does the world really need a new batch of Bo Diddley covers? When they are as good as these, yes! Producer Carla Olson assembled a quartet to record lively backing tracks for 13 Bo Diddley classics (and two songs recorded by Diddley, but penned by others), then enlisted 15 outstanding artists to overdub vocals and instrumental tracks. There are some spirited vocal performances here—I particularly enjoyed those by Joe Louis Walker, Coco Montoya, Sugar Blue, Otis Rush, Kris Wiley, and Ray Gaines—and great guitar work (especially the backing tracks by Charlie Karp). High points include Eric Sardinas' tasty electric Dobro work on "Ride on Josephine," Corey Harris' nicely-layered wah and slide guitars on "Crackin' Up," Son Seals' distinctive clean tones on "My Story," and smoking solos by Walter Trout and Kris Wiley on "Roadrunner" and "You Don't Love Me," respectively. My favorite track is Charlie Musselwhite's version of "Hey Bo Diddley." Musselwhite's harp playing is as exciting as ever, and Karp's kick-ass guitar tone provides the perfect foil. **Evidence.** —BARRY CLEVELAND

Oasis

Heathen Chemistry

Since the release of their extraordinarily successful debut album *Definitely Maybe* in 1994, Oasis have come under critical fire for unabashedly appropriating key elements of the Beatles musical legacy. Astute listeners have also noted more than passing similarities to the music of the Stones, Slade, the Smiths, T. Rex, and other seminal artists. Despite their detractors, the group's follow-up album (*What's the Story Morning Glory*) sold 17 million copies, making it the largest-selling record in British history. In recent years, declining record sales have forced the group that once touted themselves as "the greatest rock band in the world" to taste a little humble pie—a diet that doesn't seem to have done them any harm. After a two-year hiatus, and the replacement of two members, Oasis are once again poised for pop stardom.

While the band-produced *Heathen Chemistry* is not likely to be hailed as visionary, it is packed with catchy hooks and melodies, and it bristles with exuberant guitar work. Principal songwriter and guitarist Noel Gallagher attributes the latter to lots of practicing on his part, and the contributions of new members guitarist Gem Archer and guitarist-turned-bassist Andy Bell. Obvious style checking notwithstanding, *Heathen Chemistry* is full of well-crafted and enthusiastically performed material. If you're an Oasis fan you'll probably dig it, but if you're a casual listener, be forewarned—these songs are extremely hooky, and once they become lodged in your brain they're likely to be there for a *long* time. **Epic.** —BARRY CLEVELAND

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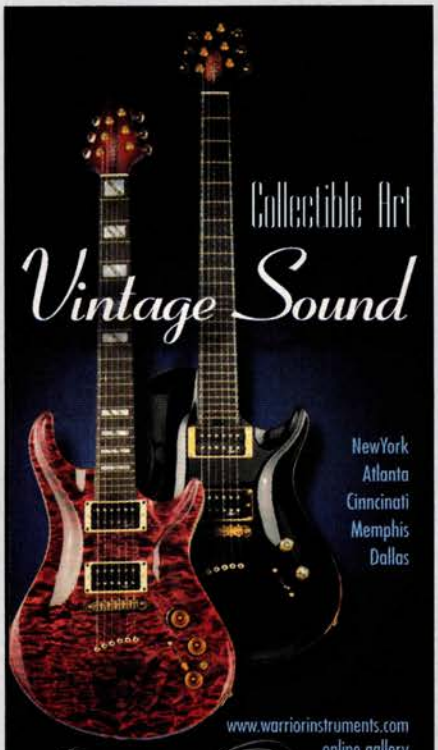

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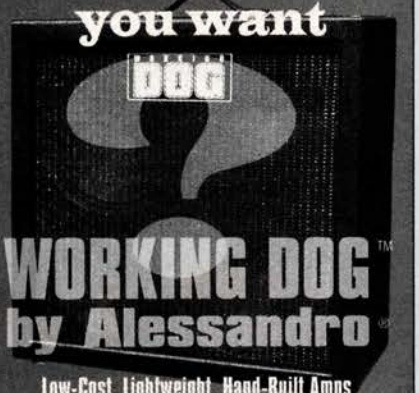

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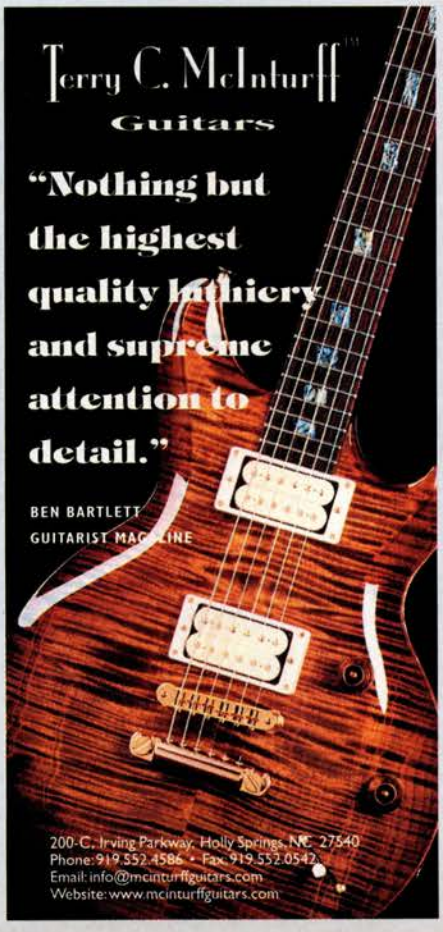

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Loud and Proud

Engl Powerball and Laney TT50H

By Darrin Fox

Snapshot Representing the loud crowd, the Engl Powerball ($3,098 retail/$2,354 street as tested with head and cabinet) and Laney TT50H ($2,248 retail/$1,800 street as tested with head and cabinet) are burly half-stacks that offer tons of tonal versatility, smart features, and bullet-proof construction.

Few things make a guitarist say "yum" quicker than the sound of a wound-up half-stack. The Engl and Laney amps reviewed here both pass the first test of any half-stack—they're *extremely* loud. They also sport oodles of controls and enough tone-tweaking options to either delight you or make your head spin. We put these brutes to the test using a Gibson SG and Les Paul and a Fender Strat and Telecaster.

Engl Powerball

Engl has been crafting high-end guitar amplifiers in Bavaria, Germany, since the early '80s. The company made its mark in 1984 with the Digitalamp—the world's first programmable tube amp—and its roster of users quickly grew to include George Lynch, Buck Dharma, Warren Haynes, and Ritchie Blackmore (who has his own signature model). Engl's newest tone machine, the Powerball ($2,199 head; 412 Vintage cabinet $899) is a 100-watt fire breather that looks street-rod tough with its heavy-steel grilles and abundance of chrome. The bitchin' visuals are enhanced by four LEDs that light up behind the power tubes to cast a sexy, red glow inside the cabinet.

Features. The Powerball offers two channels with a footswitchable secondary mode for each. Channel one shares its gain, middle, and bass controls with a Crunch mode, but there are dedicated treble and volume knobs for each section. A pair of switches (bright and bottom) add high-end sheen or low-end thump to the clean and crunch tones.

High gain is the order of the day for channel two and its Hi Lead mode, which sport independent volume knobs and bottom switches, but share a common set of gain, treble, bass, and midrange controls. You also get two flavors of midrange—open and focused—and you can choose which one you want via footswitch or front-panel switch. (The focused setting boosts the frequencies between 300Hz and 500Hz.) The only confusing part is that the open/focused function appears to pertain solely to channel two, but it's actually a *global* control that impacts channel one, as well. Other global controls include presence, Depth Punch, and two footswitchable master volumes that let you preset volume boosts for solos. The Powerball also features an output-tube monitoring system that visually alerts you when a tube fails, and then removes that tube from the circuit to ensure the amp continues to operate.

Within the heavy steel chassis is a large PC board that holds most of the amp's circuitry, including the sockets for the output bottles and the four 12AX7 preamp tubes. Most of the pots, jacks, and switches are located on five smaller boards, and the small amount of free wiring is carefully bundled and routed.

Powerballin'. Revving up channel one with a Strat produced a breathy and complex clean tone. Harmonics and funky

Kissing Cousins

Peavey Triple XXX
Head: $1,199 retail/$959 street
Triple XXX 412 slant cabinet: $699 retail/$539 street

Soldano Decatone
Head: $2,879 retail/$2,469 street
Soldano 4x12 cabinet: $1,009 retail/$869 street

VHT G-100 Pitbull Ultra Lead
Head: $3,495 retail/$2,799 street
412S Fat Bottom cabinet: $999 retail/$739 street

The Ratings Game	Tone	Workmanship	Features	Vibe	Value
Engl Powerball	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥
Laney TT50H	♥♥♥½	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥½	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥

The Rate-O-Meter: Dismal = ♥ → Excellent = ♥♥♥♥♥

Engl Powerball

- Two channels with secondary modes
- Noise gate
- Output tube LED monitors
- Four 6L6 output tubes
- 100 watts
- 412 Vintage cabinet
- Celestion Vintage 30 speakers

Laney TT50H

- Three independent channels
- MIDI capability (channel switching, reverb on/off, external effects activation)
- Boost and Xpand controls
- Spring reverb
- Two EL34 output tubes
- 50 watts
- Five-button footswitch included
- Celestion Vintage 30 speakers

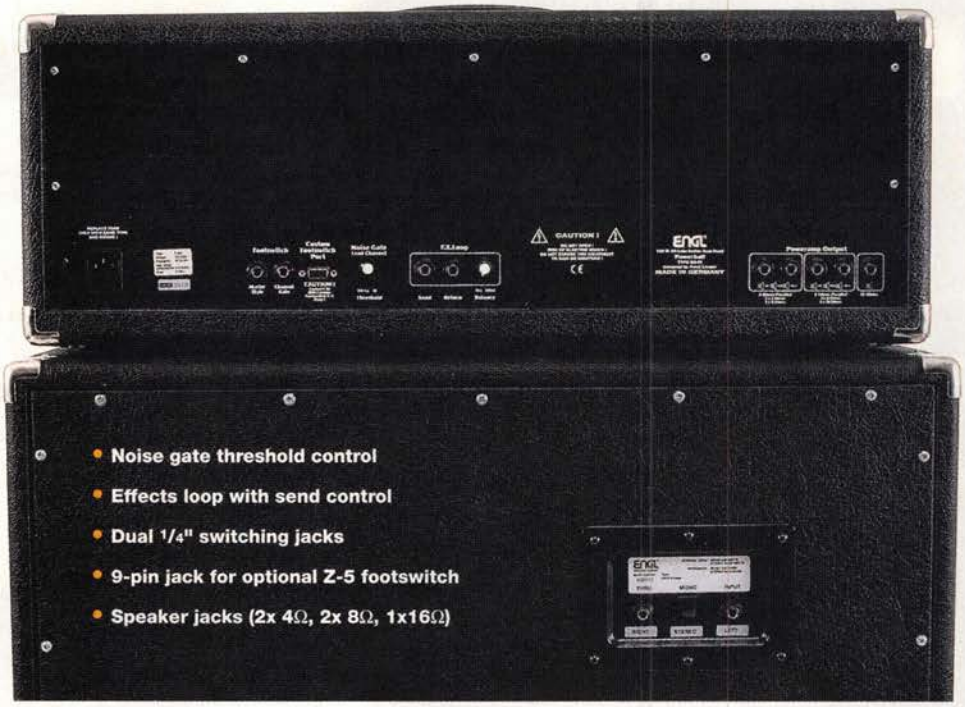
ALL PHOTOS: PAUL HAGGARD

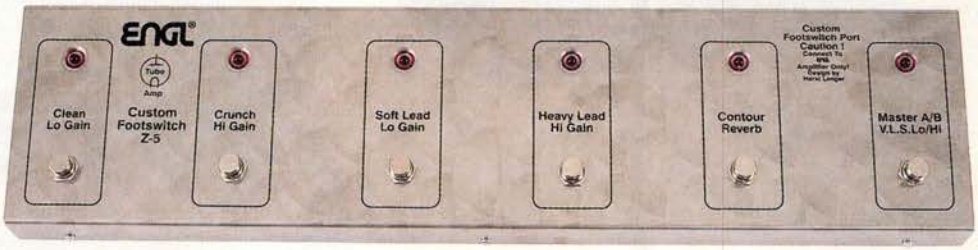
Loud and Proud

chordal skanks popped out of the speakers in vivid dimension, and though the bright switch is nicely voiced, I never needed it—even with humbuckers. In fact, only minimal EQ tweaking was required to get righteous sounds from any guitar.

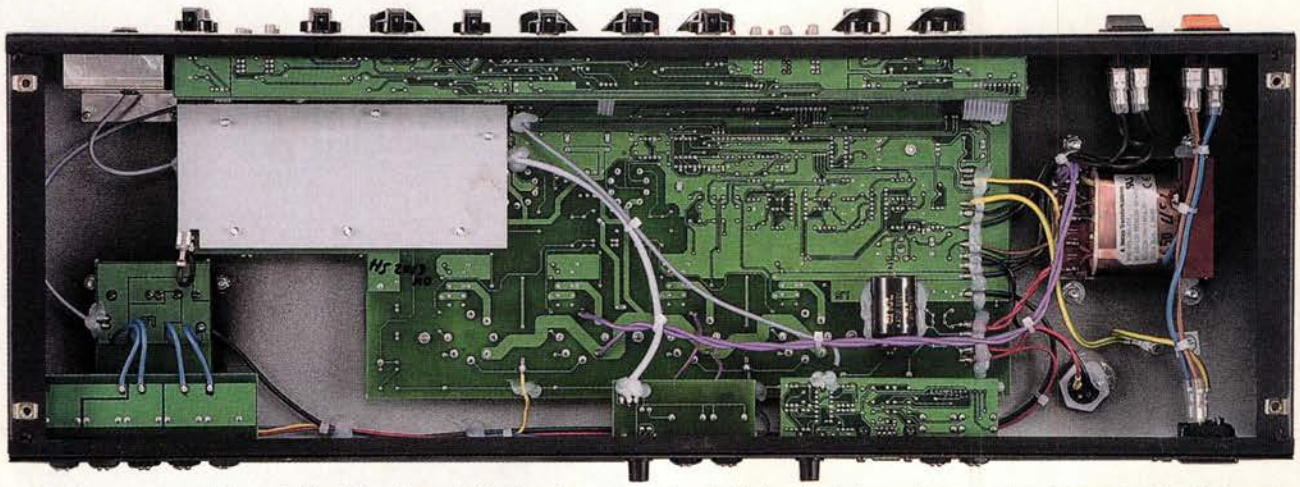
Activating the Crunch mode conjures loads of grind—certainly enough to solo with—and the separate treble controls make it easy to tailor the clean and distorted sounds. The Powerball's midrange-rich tones never grate on the ears—even at high volumes—and the dynamic response is superb. The grind cleans up very nicely when you lighten your playing touch or turn down your guitar volume.

Channel two is where things get crazy. With the gain set only halfway up, notes sustain for days—even at *whisper* volumes. Fans of rich, milkshake-thick distortion will revel in the Powerball's throaty mids and organic, vocal-like tones. And if you need more mayhem, the Hi Lead mode heaps on additional gain to make the Powerball one of the kings of over-the-top distortion. Such massive gain makes it easy to understand why the Powerball has





The Z-5 floorboard is a $235 option that features all-metal construction and a detachable cable.

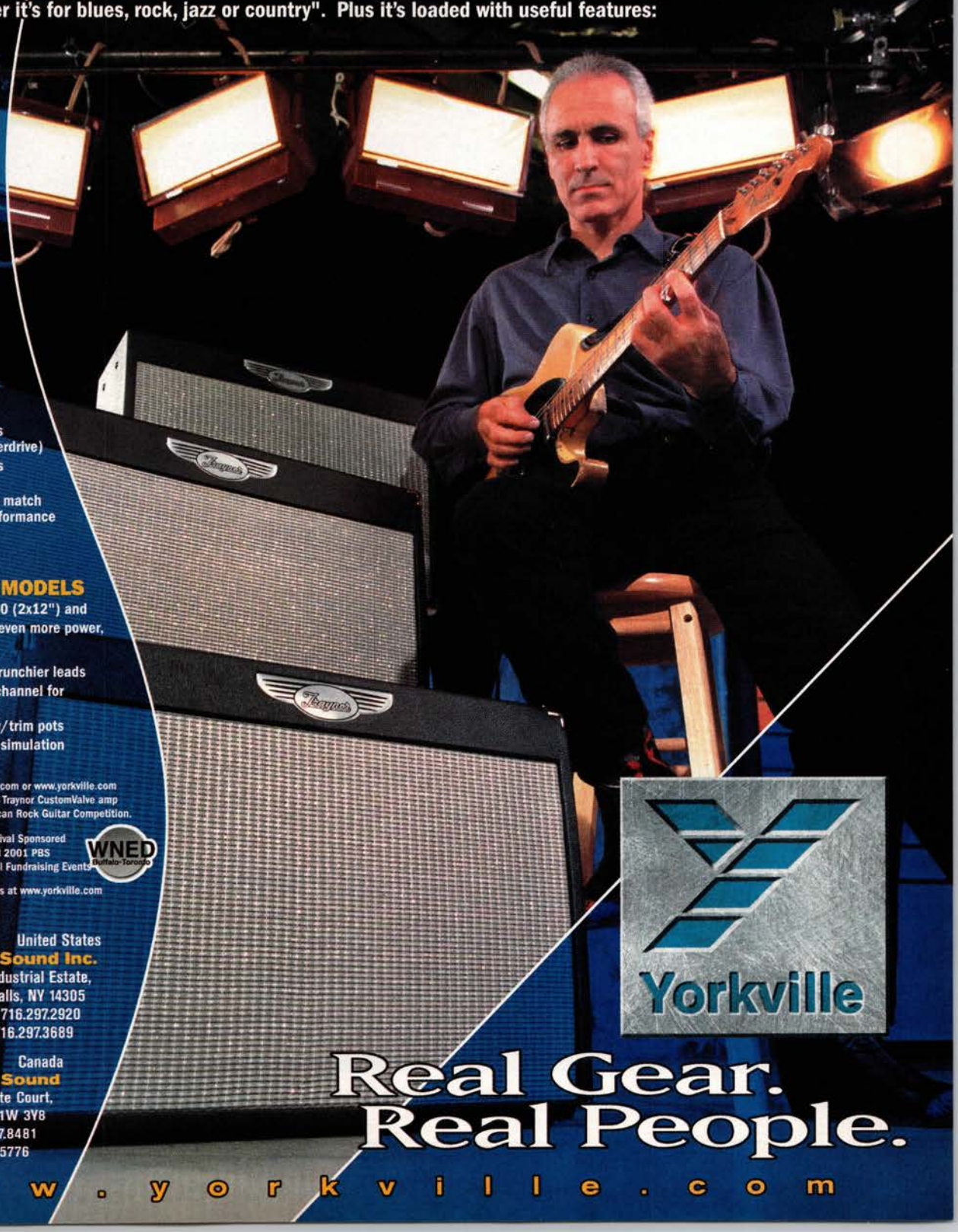


The majority of the Powerball's circuit components—including the tube sockets—are located on the five PC boards.

A Winning Combo

Doug Yeomans – 2001 North American Rock Guitar Competition winner*
TRAYNOR CustomValve 40 AMP – Guitar Player Editor's Pick Award winner**

Doug Yeomans is one of the hardest working guitarists on the Western New York/Southern Ontario music scene. From Nashville to Broadway his vast arsenal of styles and techniques makes him one of the most versatile players around. His talent was rewarded when he took first place in the North American Rock Guitar Competition in Buffalo, NY. Referring to his Traynor CustomValve 40, Doug says, "I love this amp. It brings out the sound I need -- whether it's for blues, rock, jazz or country". Plus it's loaded with useful features:



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Loud and Proud

a built-in noise gate. Unfortunately, the gate doesn't close smoothly, and it's ineffective at high gain and volume levels.

The Powerball's ability to go from a beautiful clean tone to insanely gained-out distortion puts it in an elite group with the likes of Diezel and Bogner. Anyone looking to inhabit the *extreme* ends of the tonal spectrum should take a shot with this sonic cannon.

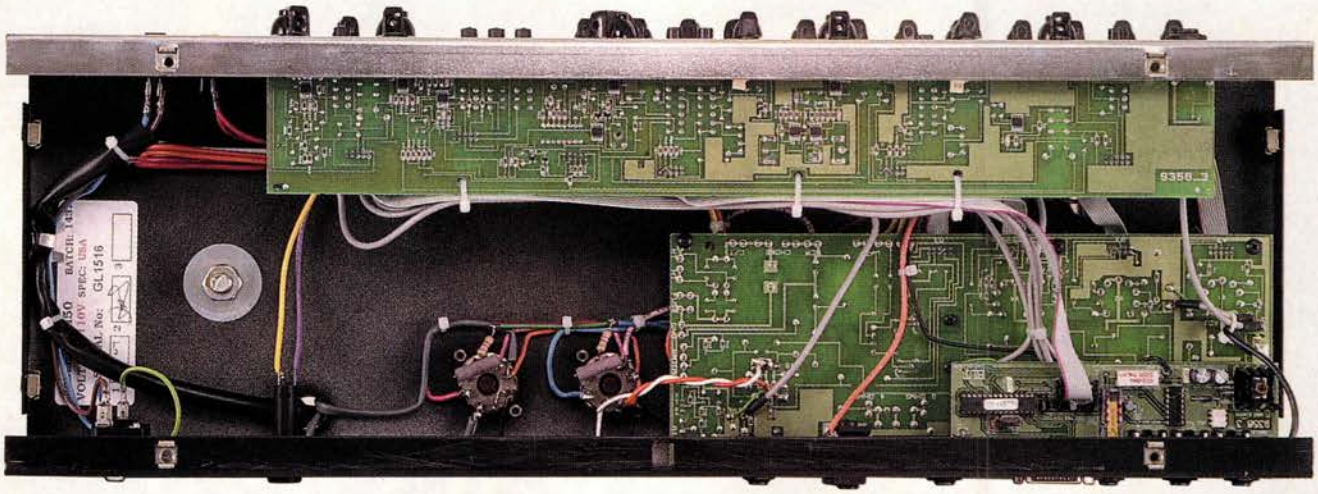
Laney TT50H

In his *The Tube Amp Book*, Groove Tubes founder Aspen Pittman states that Lyndon Laney was one of the first amp makers to realize guitarists were attracted to the sound an amp makes when it clips. Laney reportedly trademarked the term "klip" in England, and called the gain control on his early amps the Klip knob. Talk about being in tune with your target market!

More than 30-years and thousands of amps later, Laney has introduced the classy-looking 50-watt TT50H ($1,299 head; TT412H cabinet $949), which flaunts a hip, neo-vintage vibe with its shiny chrome faceplate and salt-and-pepper, basket-weave grille cloth.

Laney Layout. The TT50H

The rugged, all-metal FS6 footswitch is included with the TT50H.



Though most of the TT50H's components reside on three PC boards, the sockets for the two EL34s are bolted directly to the chassis.

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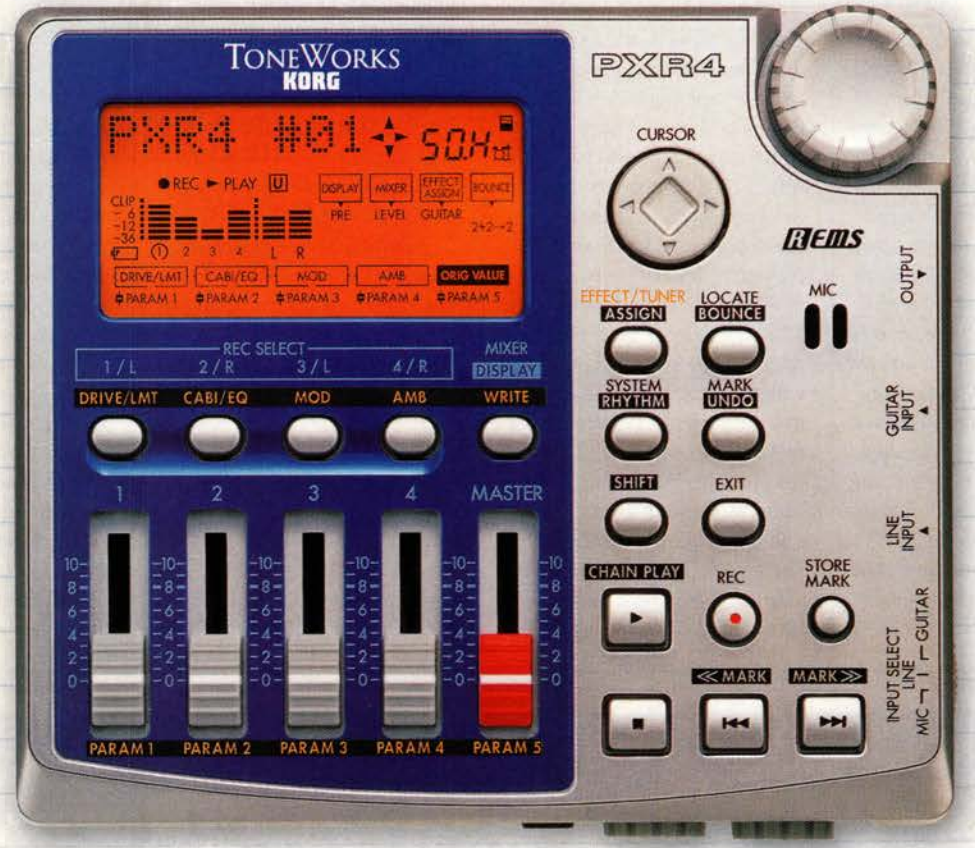

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Loud and Proud

offers three independent channels and a master section. Channel one features volume, treble, mids, bass, reverb, and a bright switch, and channels two and three feature identical controls with the addition of a Modern switch on channel two and Boost and Xpand functions on channel three. Global controls include presence, FX mix, reverb, dual master volumes, mute (for silent recording when the speaker-simulated output is active), and a damping switch that affects the amp's ability to control the cone motion of the speakers to deliver a more defined low-end response.

The TT50H's folded-steel chassis houses three circuit boards. The sockets for the six 12AX7 preamp tubes are board mounted, and the two EL34 sockets are bolted to the chassis. A full-size Accutronics reverb tank is mounted behind the cabinet's face plate. A five-button footswitch is included.

Tones. Channel one's clean tones are very crystalline, and the tones remained full and balanced whether I plugged in a Tele or a Les Paul. I would have traded some top-end sheen for more upper-mid complexity, but the dynamic sensitivity of this channel makes it ideal for clean rhythm playing or bluesy leads.

Channel two underscores the TT50H's British heritage with bright, snarling tones that are rife with midrange fang—the sound that put the U.K. on the hard-rock map. There's enough gain on tap for soloing, but I got the best tones by running the gain lower and getting any extra grind I needed by cranking the master volume. This channel also responded well to my playing dynamics. Activating the Modern switch compresses the signal slightly, giving you a tad more saturation and volume.

Channel three offers the same basic character as channel two, but its Boost and Xpand controls provide additional tonal shaping. Engaging the Boost (which is *not* footswitchable) yields a mild volume bump, and the Xpand function allows notes to blossom more freely—which reverses the inherent compression of a cranked tube amp, and allows for slightly more focused tones in high-volume, low-gain settings. These two functions are fairly subtle, but I found it refreshing to hit a button and *not* hear the whole character of the amplifier change. On all three channels, the rich-sounding reverb adds abundant depth and color to the amp's solid sounds.

Hey Laney! High gain settings on channels two and three tended to smear notes together with a loss of note definition and low-end tightness, but I liked it! Any player who treasures organic, and, at times, *rude* tones over the pristine shades of grind that many modern amps dish out will get a smile on their face when they discover what the TT50H has to offer.

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D'Angelico NYSD-9

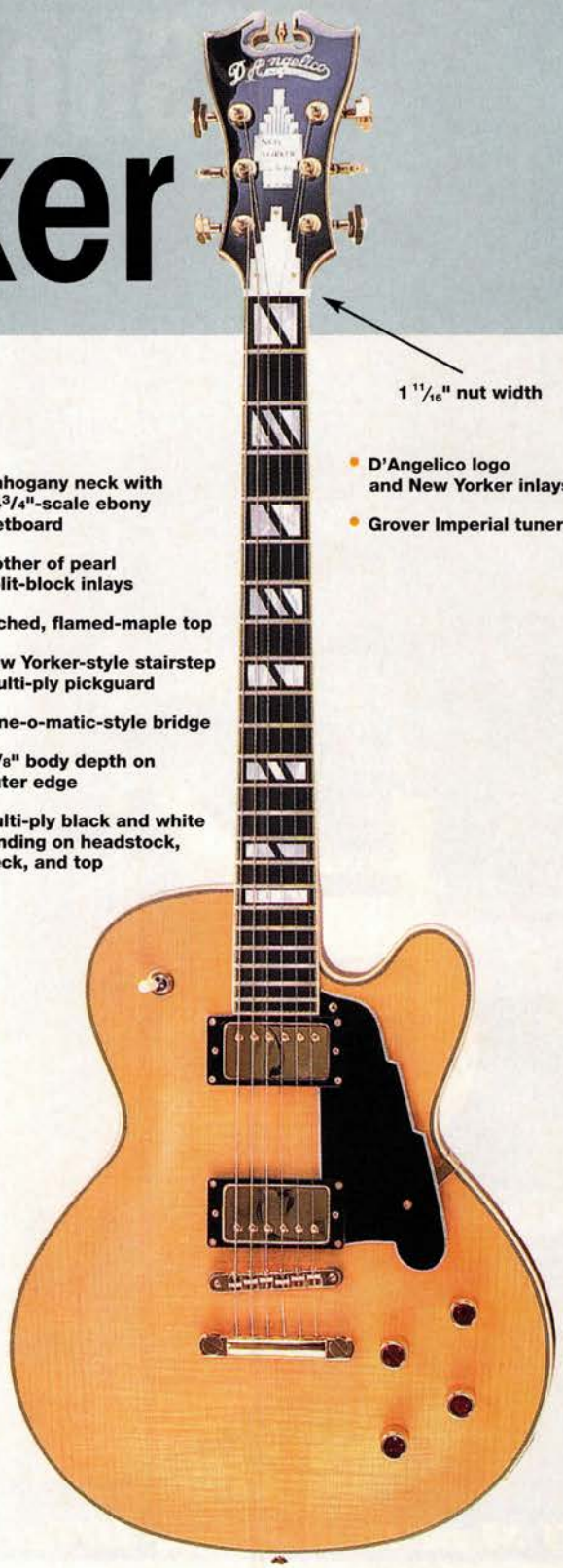
By Barry Cleveland

Among jazz guitarists, the name D'Angelico is often uttered in hushed tones. It evokes images of divine hollowbodies handcrafted in small shops by Old World luthiers of a bygone era. Between 1932 and 1964, D'Angelico produced just 1,164 guitars—each one a unique work of art. Given that original D'Angelicos typically command tens of thousands of dollars in today's market, most guitarists can only dream of owning one.

Since the company's return in 1988, however, D'Angelico guitars have been under license from Vestax, and the "Old World" craftsmen are now modern Japanese luthiers. Over the years, the company has expanded its original line of four hollowbodies, and the NYSD-9 represents D'Angelico's first foray into solidbody territory. Retaining many of D'Angelico's traditional aesthetic amenities—such as stunning inlay work, Art Deco design flourishes, gold hardware, and an oversized headstock crowned with an ornamental cupola—the NYSD-9 is an attempt to create a solidbody version of D'Angelico's classic archtops, much like when Gibson introduced the L-5S (essentially a solidbodied L-5). More versatile than the jazz guitars from which it evolved, the NYSD-9 is clearly intended to play to a wider audience than its fat-backed forebears.

Class Ax

Everything about the NYSD-9 conveys understated elegance—starting with its custom brown leather hardshell case. The guitar's sleek single-cutaway 14" body is constructed of mahogany, with an impressively matched two-piece flamed maple top, and both the back and top are gently arched. The 22-fret mahogany neck is set into the body at the 16th fret, and the disproportionately large headstock is fitted with fancy Grover Imperial tuners and a pearloid trussrod cover. The NYSD-9 is available in natural, amber, red, walnut, and translucent blackburst or blueburst—all sporting



Snapshot The D'Angelico NYSD-9 ($4,200 retail/$3,200 street) is an elegant and exquisitely-crafted instrument that handles like a dream and is versatile enough to satisfy everyone from jazz cats to rock hounds.

The Ratings Game	Tone	Playability	Workmanship	Hardware	Vibe	Value
D'Angelico NYSD-9	♥♥♥♥◖	♥♥♥♥◖	♥♥♥♥◖	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥◖	♥♥♥◖

The Rate-O-Meter: Dismal = ♥ → Excellent = ♥♥♥♥♥

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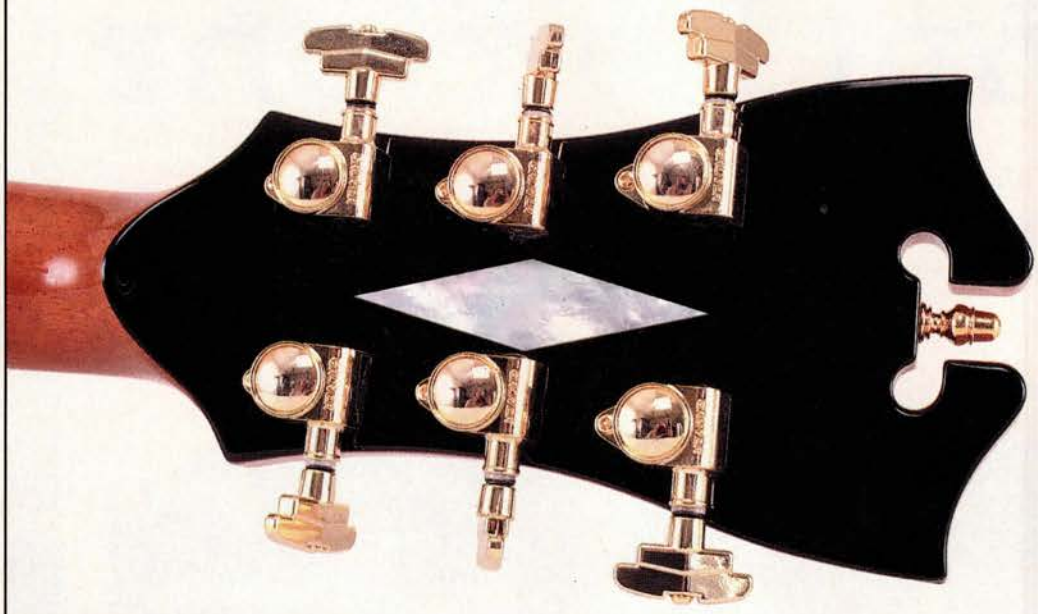


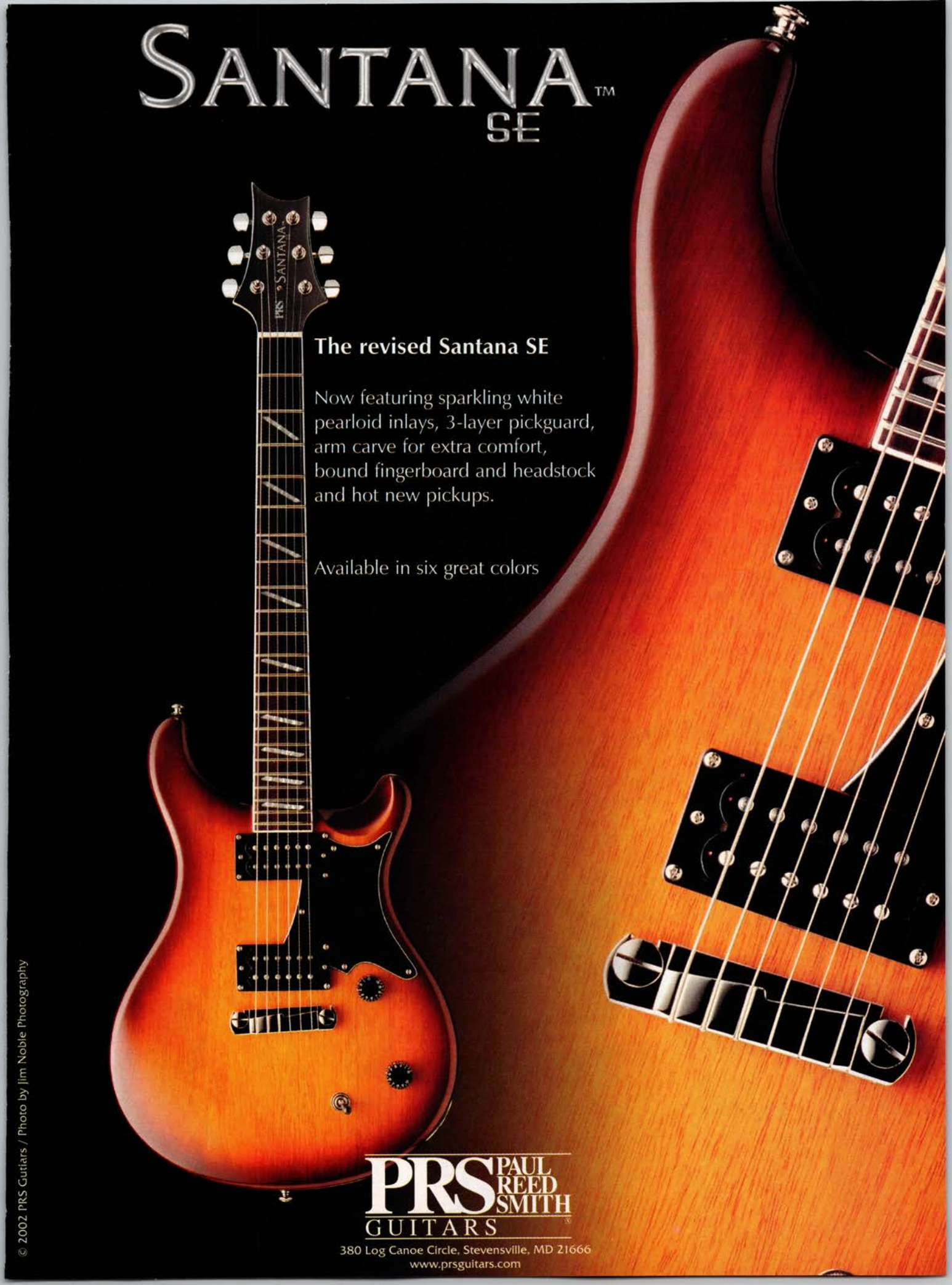
City Slicker

a glossy polyurethane finish—and the top, neck, and headstock are meticulously bound.

The NYSD-9 sports numerous cool cosmetic accoutrements, the most prominent being several large mother of pearl inlays. There's even a diamond-shaped inlay on the *rear* of the headstock. Other nice touches include Tele-style gold knobs with marbled caps, mahogany cover plates, a rosewood overlay on the rear of the headstock, and a shaped (not cast) aluminum stop-bar tailpiece.

The workmanship is generally superb—the binding and inlay work are particularly impressive—though there are what appear to be slight filing irregularities on the neck binding and one side of the pickguard.

Though similar to a Les Paul in many respects, the NYSD-9's thinner body is lighter than a Paul's, making it a good choice for someone who wants a similar look and feel without the shoulder strain. Despite its honkin' headstock, the guitar is very well-balanced and quite comfortable on the strap, though personally I would prefer to have the strap button located on the upper bout rather than the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back of the guitar (a carry-over from traditional archtop design).

The NYSD-9's electronics are all top-notch, and the wiring is neat and tidy. Both of the custom-wound humbuckers produce tons of clean level, and provide more than enough output to overdrive an amp. They're also hot enough to get the best performance out of a string of stompboxes. The volume and tone pots are sturdily mounted and work smoothly over their entire ranges.

Solid Sounds

I auditioned the NYSD-9 through a variety of amplifiers, and the guitar performed well through every rig, consistently delivering a focused bottom balanced with clear highs. Individual notes within tightly-voiced chords rang forth with exceptional clarity, even when the amps were set to "11."

Through a '68 Twin loaded with JBLs, using the rear pickup with the tone control rolled back halfway, the NYSD-9 produced fat, round jazz tones reminiscent of semi-hollow and even hollow-body Gibsons. A Vox AC30 and Matchless Chieftain brought out the guitar's brighter side, and though still a far cry from Stratsville, there were healthy amounts of chime and jangle. And, considering how unrelated the D'Angelico is to, say, a Gretsch 6120 or a Tele, I was even able to get some surprisingly twangy rockabilly and country tones using the Twin's brighter settings.

On the dirtier side of the tracks, the NYSD-9 sounded full and throaty playing the blues. With the Twin and the Chieftain cranked up, nailing stinging ES-335-like tones was a breeze, and through a wide open Marshall driving a 4x12, the NYSD-9 sang with smooth Bluesbreaker-approved sustain. Venturing even further from traditional D'Angelico territory, the NYSD-9 rocked hard when played through a Bad Cat Hot Cat combo with lots of overdrive dialed in, and it sizzled with rich overtones and tight low-end when wailing through the high-gain channel of an Engl Powerball half-stack. This is definitely not your daddy's D'Angelico!

Angel Flight

The NYSD-9 falls somewhere between jazz and rock style sensibilities, and while there are certainly costlier 6-strings, the NYSD-9's investment-grade price tag may be prohibitive for some. That said, it is a truly remarkable instrument, and any serious player on the lookout for an original guitar that is overflowing with personality and class should put the NYSD-9 through its paces.

Kissing Cousins

Gibson Les Paul Custom: $5,062 retail/$3,010 street (reviewed July, '02)
Hamer Monaco Superpro: $2,899 retail/$2,175 street
PRS Santana III: $3,532 retail/$2,650 street

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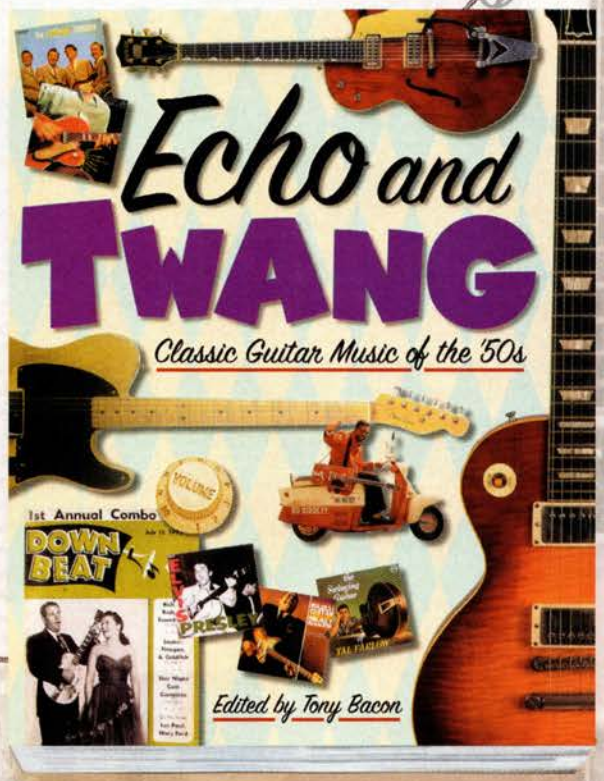

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TECHNOLOGY OF TONE

Digital Discoveries

Ableton Live, Antares kantos, and Native Instruments Reaktor

By Joe Gore

Snapshot Three cutting-edge sound-design programs—Ableton Live ($299 retail/$240 street), Antares kantos ($299 retail/$250 street), and Native Instruments Reaktor ($499 retail/$430 street)—boldly go where no tube or transistor has gone before. Native Instruments' Reaktor receives an Editors' Pick Award.

Anyone whose music-making includes both strings and software has probably already tapped into the wealth of programs and plug-ins offering digital replicas of vintage hardware. But what about software applications that have *no* hardware precedents or parallels? Three recent programs—Live, kantos, and Reaktor—all perform audio acrobatics that are beyond the capabilities of hardware signal processors and synthesizers. While none of these programs were conceived strictly for guitarists, each offers many exciting new tones and textures for 6-string adventurers.

Ableton Live

Live (version 1.51, $299) is a loop-based composing, mixing, sequencing, and signal-processing environment that follows in the footsteps of Sonic Foundry's Acid—a popular PC program that allows you to create mixes by dragging audio clips onto a score-type

Live's session window is where you compile and mix audio files. Plug-in effects can be added by dragging them from the browser at right to the strip at the bottom of the interface.

The Ratings Game	Sounds	Programmability	Innovation	Ease of use	Value
Ableton Live 1.5	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥♥
Antares kantos 1.0	♥♥♥♥◖	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥◖	♥♥♥♥♥
Native Instruments Reaktor 3.07	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥♥

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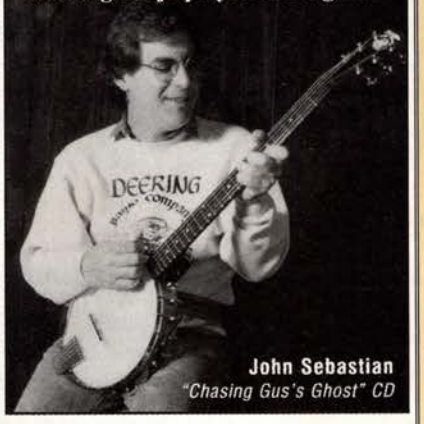
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arranger window. Live supports *both* Mac and PC platforms, and adds a number of new wrinkles that make the program especially relevant for guitarists. This stand-alone application can be routed through ASIO, DirectX, and Sound Manager outputs, or to the inputs of ReWire-compatible sequencers such as Logic, Cubase, Sonar, and Digital Performer.

Live permits you to record fresh tracks into the program, as opposed to working with pre-prepared loops. You might, for example, create a basic groove by dragging loops into the arrange windows and then overdub guitar tracks through your sound card or audio interface. After that, you can process the tracks via Live's built-in effects, or manipulate the rhythm, pitch, and timbre via a simple-yet-powerful waveform editor. You can even perform complex edits, or change a track's tempo *while* the program plays.

Live derives its name from the fact that it was designed for realtime DJ-ing and mixing. *Everything* about the program facilitates fast, intuitive operation. The interface is simple, and you can automate any control in the program's dual arranger and mixer windows with a couple of mouse clicks. An ingenious browser lets you import files from several locations at once without halting recording or playback. And Live's plug-in effects include not only such basics as delay, chorusing, compression, and reverb, but also a psycho-swirly filter delay, a futuristic grain delay, and a convincing vinyl simulator. You arrange effects in stompbox-like chains simply by dragging them from the browser.

Live supports VST, which means you can upgrade the system with most of the coolest plug-ins currently available, as well as download dozens of great free and shareware VST gadgets. (One great source for freebies is databaseaudio.co.uk.)

Like other programs that adjust loop lengths in real time, there's a pronounced "digitalness" to Live's sound. The time- and pitch-shifting aren't as smooth as, say, what you can attain from some *non-realtime* editors (one of the best being Serato's Pitch 'N Time plug-in for Pro Tools). It's an aspect of Live that I've come to appreciate, however, as that graininess often lends a hip, low-res funkiness to mixes.

The kantos interface may *look* like the set of *Aliens XIII*, but it actually offers a highly intuitive, flow-chart-type layout.

Antares kantos

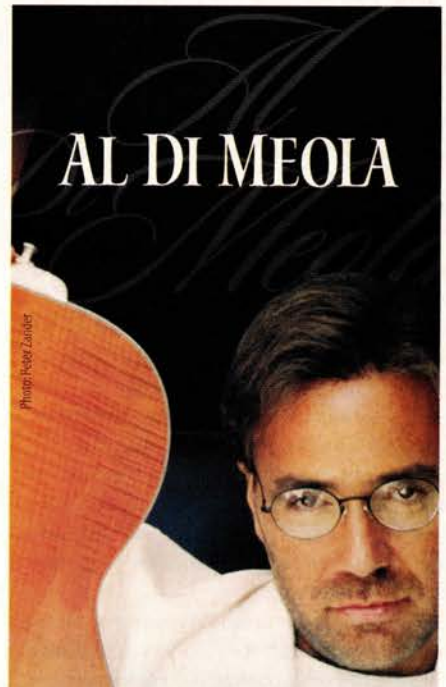
A one-of-a-kind software synthesizer plug-in, kantos (version 1.0, $299) is controlled by the pitch, dynamic, and timbral info it extracts from incoming audio. Available in RTAS, MAS, and VST format, the program runs on all the Mac sequencer platforms, but is not yet available for PCs.

Unlike a guitar synth driven by a hexaphonic pickup, kantos is monophonic—which means the software engine can only produce one sound (or voice) at a time. Also, you generally need to feed kantos a clean, dry signal (reverb, distortion, and delay easily confuse the program), and, even then, you'll have to spend more time adjusting trigger/gate parameters than on a hex system. Furthermore, kantos is subject to all the latency issues encountered on most hard-disc recording systems. Depending on the synth sound used, the musical context, your computer's speed, and your tolerance for tracking with a slight delay, you may simply abandon the idea of recording while listening through kantos in favor of inserting it on already-recorded tracks.

On the plus side, kantos' synth engine is vastly hipper than the ones included in the hex-based packages. It's a simple-yet-versatile dual-oscillator system with a virile modulation matrix, a tap-tempo input, a full complement of filters, and a solid mixer section. The oscillator sources include not only the standard waveforms, but also a library of wavetables, which you can supplement with your own 16-bit mono audio clips. Nice. And despite the interface's evil-alien look, the controls are arranged in a logical, flow-chart fashion. A number of controls are laid out as X/Y grids, which makes it possible to, say, set the filters' bandwidth and cutoff frequencies with a single mouse motion. It's a fun, intuitive way to work.

Equally significant is the fact that kantos, unlike hardware guitar synths, responds not only to pitch and dynamic info, but also to timbre. That means you can generate tones that sound not so much like a guitar driving a synth as a guitar *mating* with a synth. The results can be eerily futuristic and subtly organic. The "articulator" control at the center of the interface lets you dial in the exact amount of timbral coloration derived from the input signal, and an adjacent slider lets you inflict surreal tone warpage by shifting the formant frequencies of your guitar signal. Conversely, you can make kantos derive its pitch not from the input signal, but from a vocoder-style keyboard, or override the input envelope via an ADSR envelope generator.

If you want to trigger conventional synth sounds from the fretboard with minimal fuss (and don't mind installing a hex pickup on



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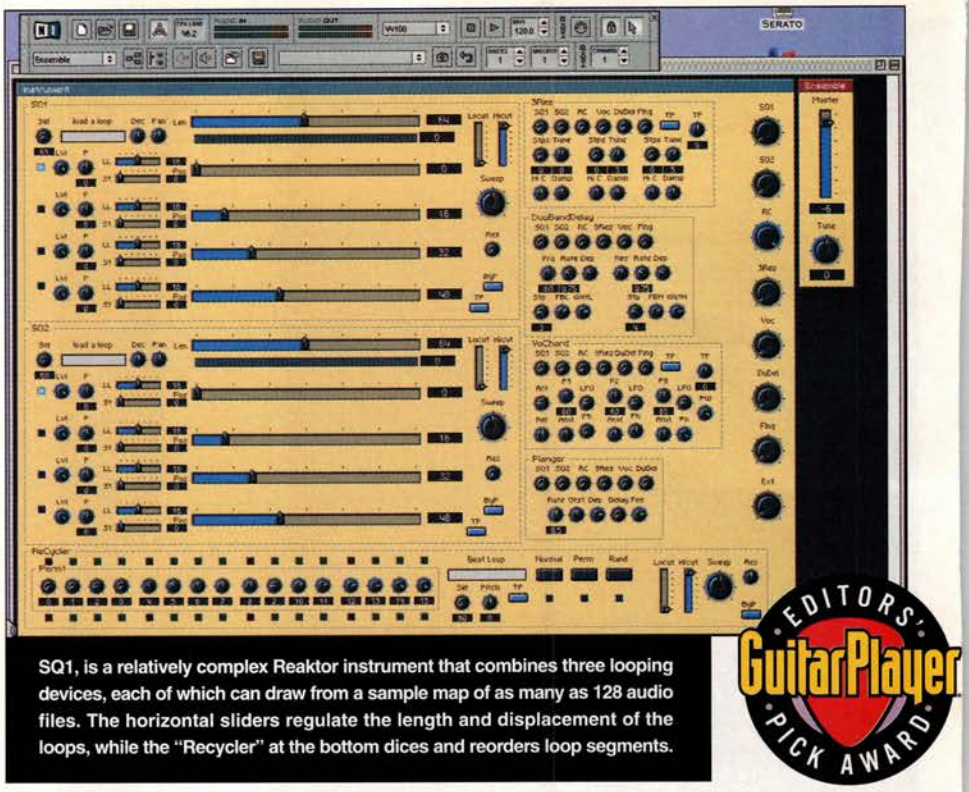
your guitar), a hardware synth is a better, if more expensive, way to go. But those who enjoy spelunking for new tonal thrills owe it to themselves to investigate this innovative program.

Native Instruments Reaktor

Reaktor (version 3.07, $499) is an open-ended collection of synths, samplers, effectors, processors, groove boxes, and radical sound-deconstruction tools. It's also an environment that lets you blend and modify the virtual instruments, or even build new ones from scratch, component by component. Reaktor ships with dozens of hip prefab instruments, and you can download *hundreds* more from the NI website. There isn't room here to explore Reaktor in all its Mariana Trench depth, but having used this program obsessively for some time now, I can share a few observations.

Reaktor runs as an audio plug-in on all the leading Mac and PC sequencers. Inserting it onto a guitar track provides access to countless processing options, including many effects you won't find on any stompbox, such as granular synthesis, grain-cloud delay, sequencer-clocked file-chopping, offbeat distortion flavors (shortwave-radio simulation, for example), and countless other hues.

But I usually find myself using Reaktor as a standalone application, because its stiff processing demands make for crash-prone operation even on such buff computers as my 500MHz Mac G4 laptop and 800MHz G4 tower. Yet I have few complaints. I've gotten great results time and again by assembling song-starter textures and grooves by importing previously recorded tracks into Reaktor via its simple



SQ1, is a relatively complex Reaktor instrument that combines three looping devices, each of which can draw from a sample map of as many as 128 audio files. The horizontal sliders regulate the length and displacement of the loops, while the "Recycler" at the bottom dices and reorders loop segments.

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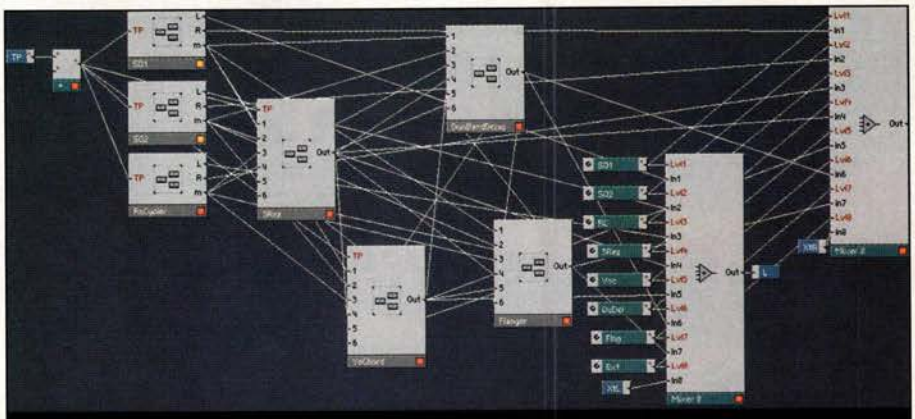
drag-and-drop interface, or tracking new ones directly into the program. I might, for example, synchronize, process, and mix multiple files with one of Reaktor's Acid/Live-style looper instruments, or warp a track beyond recognition via any of a hundred compellingly complex audio shredders. When something starts to sound inspiring, I save it as a stereo file, and then import it into Logic, Live, or Pro Tools. Another fruitful technique involves exporting a less-than-thrilling file from a mix in progress, reinventing it in Reaktor, and returning it to the mix.

Reaktor allows you to compile banks of samples (called sample maps) of as many as 128 audio files. One particularly inspiring way to work is to combine several instruments/processors, each drawing from its own sample map, and then dial through the maps until something clicks. There are even Reaktor instruments that control the sample selection within each sample map via sequencer or random selection. It gets *deep*. Most Reaktor sounds are big, bold, and aggressive, with lots of digital-in-a-cool-way slice. The program also supports sample rates as high as 96kHz.

Is Reaktor for you? If the preceding paragraphs make your eyes glaze over, run the other way. But if such procedures strike you as a grand adventure, this heavy, *heavy* program earns my highest recommendation.



Venture under Reaktor's hood—if you dare. On this level you can modify instruments or assemble them from scratch.

Kissing Cousins

Sonic Foundry Acid Pro 3.0: $399 retail/$200 street
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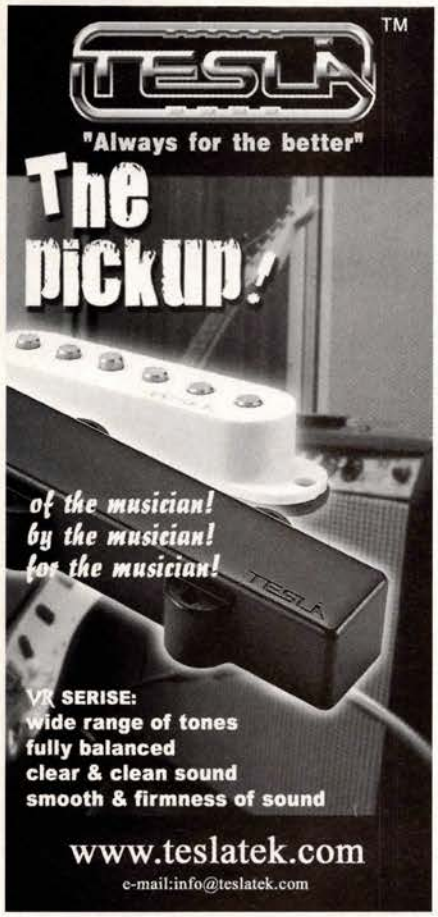

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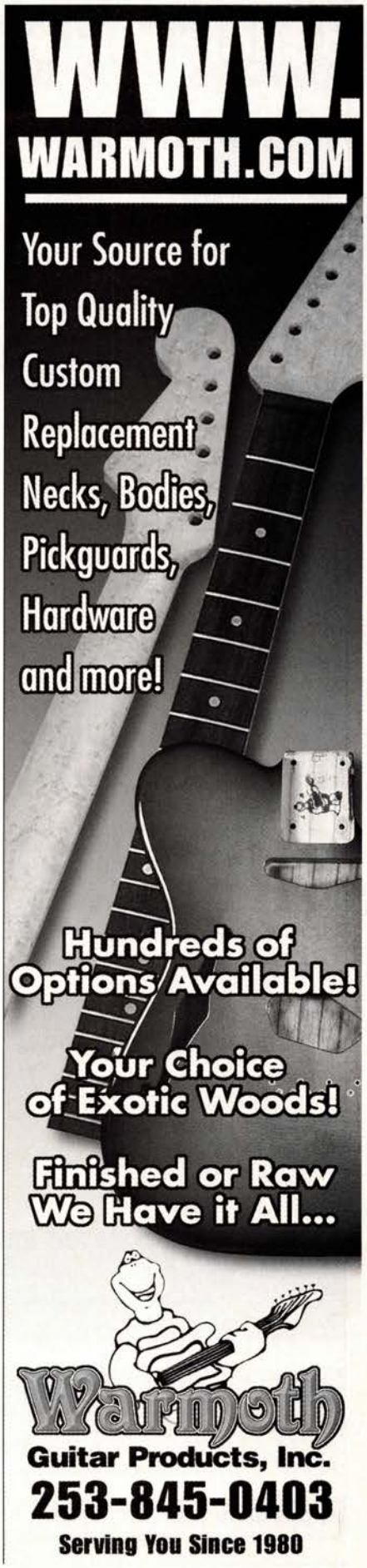

Twist and Shout

Lace Cybercaster

By Art Thompson

It's safe to say that most electric guitars being made today score high in the playability department. Hardly anyone makes a bad neck anymore, setups are generally quite good, and even many budget models boast superb fretwork. So what's left for an innovative guitar maker to do? One answer is the Lace Music Products Cybercaster ($1,499), a one-of-a-kind instrument that offers enhanced playability via a spiral-twist fretboard.

With its vintage-yellow finish, black pickguard, and knurled knobs, the Cybercaster resembles a Telecaster that has been pulled and stretched into a elongated shape measuring approximately 20" in length. Beautifully finished in translucent butterscotch, the two-piece ash body sports a pair of height-adjustable Hemi

- 25 1/2"-scale maple bolt-on neck with 10.8-degree spiral profile
- Gotoh tuners
- Ash body
- Carbon-fiber pickguard
- Lace Hemi humbuckers
- Volume and tone controls, 3-way pickup selector
- Machined aluminum trussrod and heel plates

Snapshot The Lace Cybercaster ($1,499 retail/$1,199 street) is a boldly designed solidbody that promises easier playing courtesy of a unique, spiral-profile neck.

The Ratings Game	Tone	Playability	Workmanship	Hardware	Vibe	Value
Lace Cybercaster	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥½	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥½	♥♥♥♥

The Rate-O-Meter: Dismal = ♥ → Excellent = ♥♥♥♥♥

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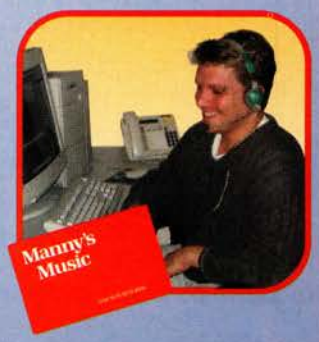


Twist and Shout

humbuckers—one mounted to the carbon-fiber pickguard, the other residing in the chromed-steel bridge plate.

Neck Specs

The Cybercaster's round maple neck mates to the body via a four-bolt joint. A machined-aluminum trussrod cover adds some custom-car flair (a similar plate is used on the heel), and the absence of fretboard markers keeps the look clean and simple. The 21 jumbo frets are satin polished for a smooth feel, but their tops aren't crowned very precisely and some of the ends are a little inconsistent. Sighting down the fretboard from the butt end makes it easy to see the neck's flagship feature: a 10.8-degree spiral twist that's carved into the solid maple blank during the shaping process.

Playability

Though a twisted neck would seem to be something to avoid at all cost, here, it's a good thing. With its low action, the Cybercaster already has a nice playing feel. What the spiral fretboard buys you is a more relaxed hand angle as you fret closer to the nut. You can immediately sense how the neck's inward slant relieves tension on your wrist and upper part of your hand, making for a more natural grip. We're not talking about a radically different playing experience, but those with tendonitis or cramping problems will instantly appreciate the improved ergonomics.

Contact Info

Lace Music Products, 5561 Engineer Dr., Huntington Beach, CA 92649; (800) 575-5223; lacemusic.com.

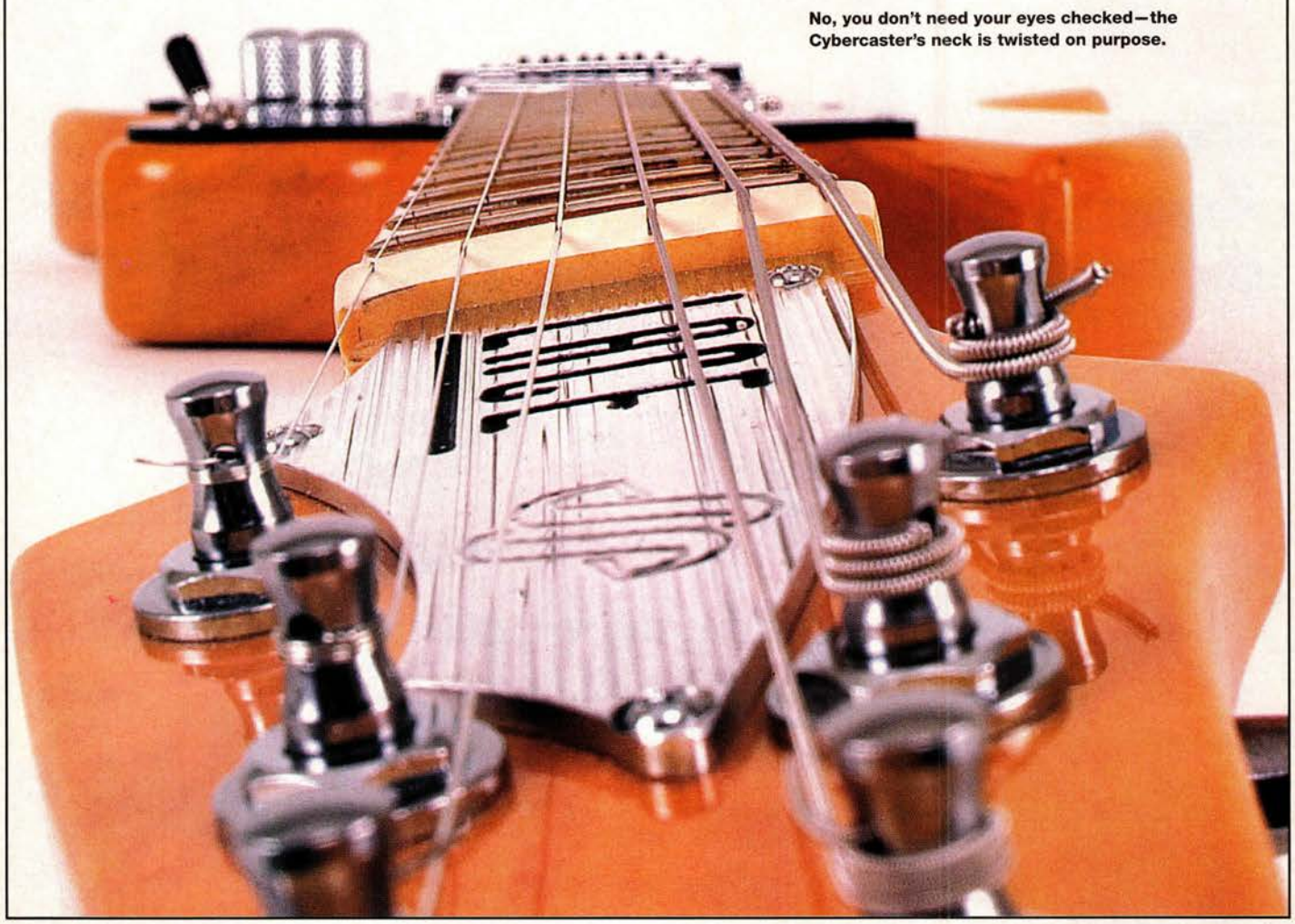
Tones

Sonically, the Cybercaster offers a satisfying blend of brightness and chunk. Lead tones walk the line between Fender snarl and Gibson-style moan, and played through a '64 Fender Super Reverb, a Dr. Z Route 66, and a Victoria Double Deluxe, the Cybercaster churned out everything from aggressive grind to purring clean textures.

The tone control is interesting: Rolling it down accentuates the midrange until it almost sounds like you're running through a notched wah. At the extreme, these tones were a little too honky for my tastes—especially when playing through a distorted amp. I preferred the sound with the tone knob wide open, a configuration that allows the Cybercaster to deliver everything from stinging blues tones to savage crunch.

The Twist

Regardless of how its squashed-Tele shape hits you, the Cybercaster is a clever design that successfully elevates the playability bar. Given the challenges of trying to advance the state of electric guitar, Lace deserves kudos for incorporating such a radical element into what is basically a blues-rock guitar with a hot-rod attitude. Heck, they laughed at the guy who came up with the Telecaster, so why not give the Cybercaster a try? You just might find yourself witnessing another revolution in guitar design!



No, you don't need your eyes checked—the Cybercaster's neck is twisted on purpose.

"We never thought of ourselves as a noise band."— Lee Ranaldo of Sonic Youth, Feb. '89, *GP*

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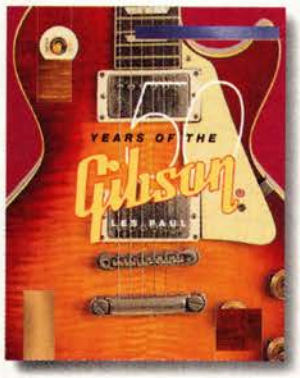

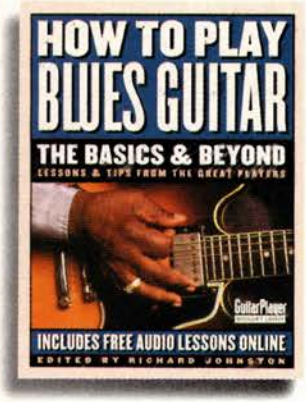

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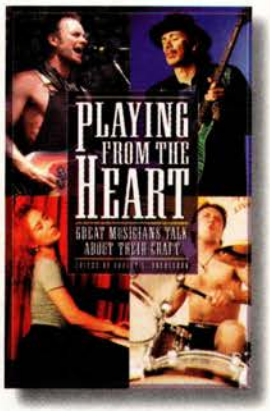

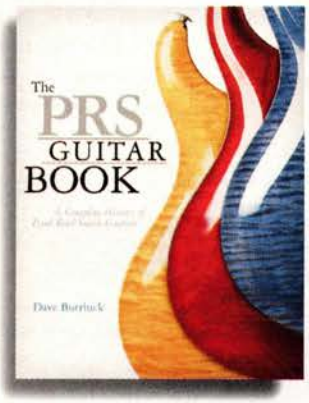

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Gizmo Alert Boss PW-10 V-Wah

If you're a true wah freak, multitudes of wah pedals overflow onto your pedalboard, or the floor of your home studio. But even after daisy-chaining several different flavors, you're never *really* satisfied, are you?

An extremely compact and powerful approach to your filter frenzy is offered by Boss' new V-Wah ($195 retail/$149 street). This single, pillow-light pedal harbors six wah models (CryBaby, Vox, Morley, Bass Mix, Custom, and Advanced), voice- and synth-sound modes, a Uni-Vibe emulation, eight models of various overdrive and distortion stompboxes, and three programmable user memories. Oh yeah, there's also a noise gate and two status LEDs (on/off and memory/manual).

The six wah models exploit a broad range of filter spectrums, and although the CryBaby, Vox, and Morley emulations are more pristine and less gritty than the originals, the models definitely cop the personalities of the real deals. However, the V-Wah isn't—or *shouldn't* be—about emulating classic wah sounds. The real superpower is the pedal's ability to construct unique wahs and throw a few tricks (such as vocal and synth sounds) into the mix.

The versatile Wah Range knob can transform, say, a basic Vox tone into a blistered, low-end warble, or spike the mids into trash-can territory. Dial in the sound of a Boss OD-1 overdrive model for some shredded funkiness, and you've got one sexy, customized wah. And that's just *one* possibility! The V-Wah can morph into just about any wah color you can dream up. So much so, that exploring the abundance of sounds is almost more fun than actually *playing* the thing!

Bummers? Only that the voice mode tends to splatter during fast pedal work. And while the textured metal and rubber pedal initially didn't inspire confidence, it's actually extremely responsive, smooth, and rugged. It's clearly designed for standing stompers, however, as most sitting positions make it difficult to nail the pedal's heel (manual/memory/bypass) and toe (wah on/off) manipulations. An optional Boss PSA-120 power adaptor ($24) is also in order, as the V-Wah requires six AA batteries that fade after 38 hours of use.

Bottom line: The V-Wah is more a filter *workstation* than an effects box, and it holds enough firepower to keep even terminally wah-obsessed guitarists spinning in the euphoria of option bliss. —MICHAEL MOLENDA

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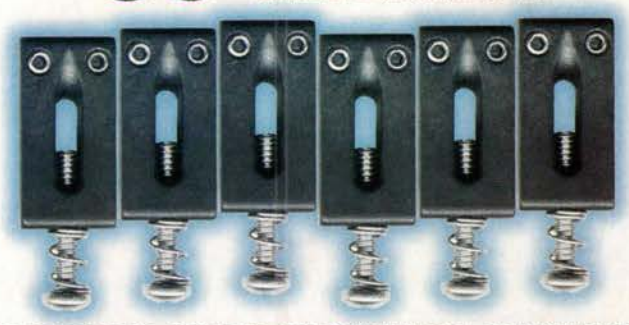

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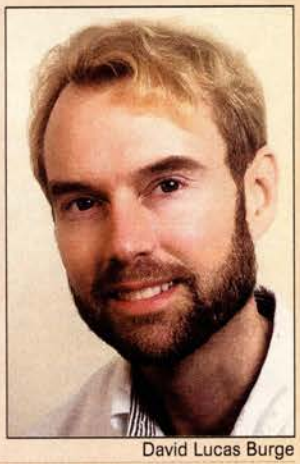

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It all started as a sort of teenage rivalry . . .

I'd slave at the piano for five hours daily. Linda practiced far less. Yet somehow she always shined as the star performer at our school. It was frustrating. *What does she have that I don't?* I'd wonder.

Linda's best friend, Sheryl, bragged on and on to me, adding more fuel to my fire. "*You* could never be as good as *Linda*," she would taunt. "*Linda's* got *Perfect Pitch*."

"What's Perfect Pitch?" I asked.

Sheryl gloated about some of Linda's uncanny abilities: how she could name *exact tones and chords*—all BY EAR; how she could sing any tone —*from mere memory*; how she could play songs —after just *hearing* them!

My heart sank. *Her fantastic EAR is the key to her success.* How could I ever hope to compete with her?

But it bothered me. Did she *really* have Perfect Pitch? I finally asked Linda point-blank if it was true.

"Yes," she nodded to me aloofly.

But Perfect Pitch was too good to believe. I rudely pressed, "*Can I test you sometime?*"

"OK," she replied.

Now she'd eat her words . . .

My plot was ingeniously simple: When Linda least suspected, I challenged her to name tones—*by ear*.

I made her stand so she could not see the piano keyboard. I made sure other classmates could not help her. I set up everything perfectly so I could expose her Perfect Pitch claims as a ridiculous joke.

With silent apprehension, I selected a tone to play. (She'll *never* guess F♯!)

I had barely touched the key.

"F♯," she said. I was astonished.

I played another tone.

"C," she announced, not stopping to think.

Frantically, I played more tones, skipping here and there all over the keyboard. But somehow she knew the pitch each time. She was *AMAZING!*

"Sing an E♭," I demanded, determined to mess her up. She sang a tone. I checked her on the keyboard—but she was right on!

Now I started to boil. I called out more tones, trying hard to make them increasingly difficult. Still she sang each note perfectly on pitch.

"How in the world do you do it?" I blurted. I was totally boggled. (age 14, 9th grade)

I was totally boggled. "*How in the world do you do it?*" I blurted.

"I don't know," she sighed. And that was all I could get out of her!

The dazzle of Perfect Pitch hit me like a ton of bricks. My head was dizzy with disbelief. Yet from then on, I knew that Perfect Pitch was real.

I couldn't figure it out . . .

"How does she DO it?" I kept asking myself. On the other hand, why can't *everyone* recognize tones by ear? It dawned on me: people call themselves *musicians* and yet they can't tell a C from a C♯?? Or A major from F major?! That's as strange as a portrait painter who can't name the colors of paint on his palette! It all seemed odd and contradictory.

Humiliated and puzzled, I went home to work on this problem. At age 14, this was a hard nut to crack.

You can be sure I tried it for myself. With a little sweet-talking, I would get my three brothers and two sisters to play tones for me—to name by ear. But it turned into a guessing game I just couldn't win.

Day after day I tried to learn Perfect Pitch. I would play a tone *over* and *over* to make it stick in my head. But later I couldn't remember any of them. And I couldn't recognize any of the tones by ear. Somehow they all sounded the same after awhile; how were you supposed to know which was which—just by *listening?*

I would have done anything to have an ear like Linda, but it was way beyond my reach.

So, finally, I gave up.

Then it happened . . .

It was like a miracle . . . a twist of fate . . . like finding the lost Holy Grail. Once I stopped *straining* my ear, I started to listen NATURALLY. Then the incredible secret to Perfect Pitch jumped right into my lap.

I began to notice faint "colors" within the tones. Not *visual* colors, but colors of *pitch*, colors of *sound*. They had always been there. But this was the first time I had ever really "let go"—and *listened*—to discover these subtle differences.

Soon—to my own disbelief—*I too could recognize the tones by ear!* It was simple. I could hear how F♯ sounds one way, while B♭ has a *totally different sound*—sort of like "hearing" red and blue!

The realization struck me: THIS IS PERFECT PITCH! This is how Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart could mentally envision their masterpieces—and

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know tones, chords, and keys—all by ear!

It was almost childish—I felt sure that *anyone* could unlock their own Perfect Pitch by learning this simple secret of "color hearing."

Bursting with excitement, I went to tell my best friend, Ann (a flutist).

She *laughed* at me. "You have to be *born* with Perfect Pitch," she asserted. "You can't *develop* it."

"You don't understand Perfect Pitch," I countered. I showed her how to listen. Timidly, she confessed that she too could hear the pitch colors. With this jump start, Ann soon realized that she had also gained Perfect Pitch for herself.

We became instant celebrities. Classmates loved to call out tones for us to magically sing from thin air. They played chords for us to name by ear. They quizzed us on what key a song was in. Everyone was endlessly fascinated with our "supernatural" powers, yet to Ann and me, it was just normal.

Back then I never dreamt I would later cause such a stir in the academic world. But as I entered college and started to explain my discovery, many professors *laughed* at me.

"You must be *born* with Perfect Pitch," they'd say. "You can't *develop* it."

I would listen politely. Then I'd reveal the simple secret—*so they could hear it for themselves*. You'd be surprised how fast they changed their tune!

In college, my so-called "perfect ear" allowed me to *skip over* two required music courses. Perfect Pitch made *everything* easier for me—my ability to perform, compose, arrange, transpose, improvise, sight-read (because—without looking—you're sure you're playing the correct tones)—and my *enjoyment* of music skyrocketed. I learned that music is very definitely a HEARING art.

Oh, so you must be wondering what happened with Linda? Please excuse me, I'll have to backtrack. . .

It was now my senior year of high school. I was nearly 18. In these three-and-a-half years with Perfect Pitch, my piano teacher insisted I had made ten years of progress. And I had. But my youthful ambition still wasn't satisfied. I needed one more each spring, complete with judges and awards. To my horror, they scheduled me that year as the *grand finale* of the entire event.

The day arrived. Linda gave her usual sterling performance. She would be tough to match, let alone surpass. But my turn finally came, and I went for it.

Slinking to the stage, I sat down and played my heart out. The applause was overwhelming.

Later, posted on the bulletin board, I discovered my score of A+ in the most advanced performance category.

Linda got an A.

Sweet victory was music to my ears—mine at last!

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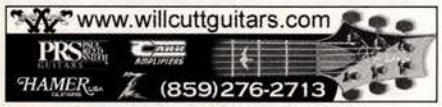

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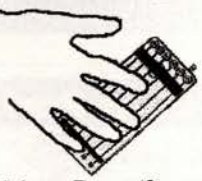

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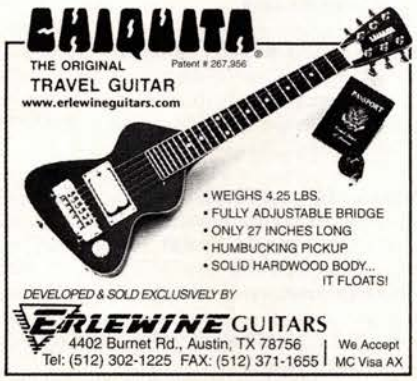

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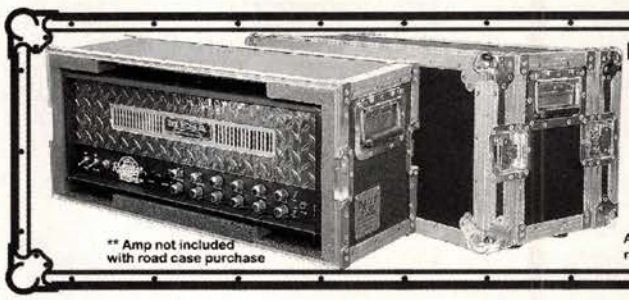

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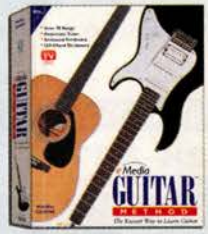

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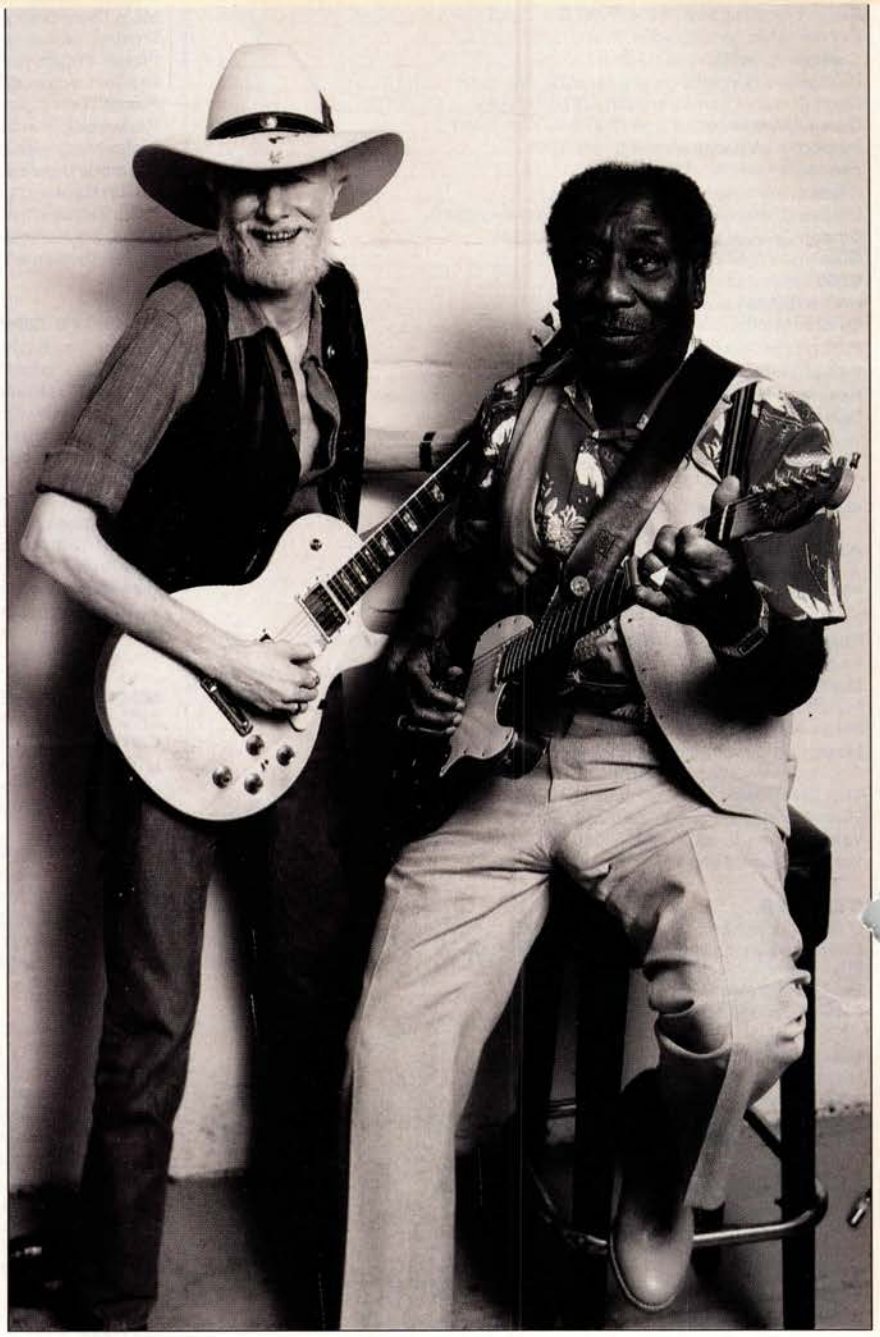

IDEAS FOR ARTICLES occasionally come from asking, "What's the coolest thing we can imagine," or simply, "What if?" What if Johnny Winter interviewed Muddy Waters? The two not only performed together, they also collaborated to record three Grammy-winning albums. In the introduction to the interview excerpted here from the August 1983 issue, I wrote: "Johnny's unbounded admiration for his mentor was matched by the appreciation that Muddy felt for his follower's efforts on behalf of the blues. The interplay between the two reveals a glimpse of their unique relationship, and outlines the impact of Muddy's blues odyssey from the Mississippi Delta to Chicago's South Side." —TOM WHEELER

• • • •

Muddy, you've said your guitar style was influenced primarily by two people.

Waters: Son House and Robert Johnson. I was already doing my thing when Robert's records came out, and I never followed him around to hear him. But Son House I did follow around, and I believe the way Robert played, you could hear some of Son House in him. Robert was putting in more notes, about three notes to one. He was one of the greatest of the slide players.

Winter: Muddy has told me there were a lot of players to learn from in the Delta—not just the ones you've heard of, but many who never got recorded. Being even as great as Muddy wasn't enough by itself. He's also very stable and very intelligent, and always working. Some good musicians were real itinerant—they just didn't care and they couldn't hold a band together.

Waters: Not with Krazy Glue [*laughs*]. There were great players all over the place, they just didn't take it for a career. They'd pick up a guitar and play it like heck and then put it down and forget it. But I'd listen, maybe do things a little different, learn a few notes to add, then other people would add more notes until you get up to this boy here—Johnny will stick about 18 notes in there instead of three [*laughs*]. When I got up to Chicago in 1943, it was going already, with Tampa Red, Memphis Slim, Lonnie Johnson, and Big Bill Broonzy.

Winter: But boy, they didn't sound nothing like the blues Muddy started up there.

Waters: No, it was different, but I had a hard time trying to get it through. I brought up the deep-bottom Mississippi Delta blues, and blues like Big Bill's was entirely different. Mine was a rustier sound, a grittier sound.

Winter: One little area of the Delta would have a sound all its own. Go a few hundred miles, and it wouldn't sound the same at all. You can't exaggerate how distinctive Muddy is. If he stops playing, the whole feeling changes, because he's got that Mississippi thing and the Chicago sound all wrapped up together.

What about his impact aside from influencing guitarists?

Winter: One of the most important things he did was to set up a particular instrumentation—piano, two guitars, bass, drums, and harp. That became the model—with variations—for many who followed. And he goes out of his way to help musicians: Otis Spann, James Cotton, Little Walter, Guitar Jr., and so many others. Muddy's the father. It's a debt that'll never be repaid in full. Lately I've felt great because he has started to get the recognition he has deserved for so long.

Waters: Thanks to you.

Winter: No, no, no. I ain't done anything. [*Winter leaves to get his guitar.*]

Waters: [*whispering*] That's my son.

"I want to hear every note speak." — Bryan Sutton, June '00, *GP*

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